HANNAH BYE

HARRISON · S · MORRIS

HANNAH BYE

AN ECLOGUE IN PROSE

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/hannahbye0000harr

HANNAH BYE

BY

HARRISON S. MORRIS

THE PENN PUBLISHING
COMPANY PHILADELPHIA
1920

COPYRIGHT
1920 BY
THE PENN
PUBLISHING
COMPANY

HANNAH BYE

HANNAH BYE

An Eclogue in Prose

CHAPTER I

Through a lane dark with overhanging foliage; across a stone pathway, open a white-washed gate, and you stand before the door: a paneled door, ornamented with carved moulding, and set in a rim of heavy colonial masonry. Look above it. Three green-shaded windows look back at you, and clean walls coated with blue-wash, foretell, in spite of a century of hard weather, tidier comforts within. A bright knocker reaches itself into your hand. Give it a double rap. Wait and listen;—footsteps in the hall; a turn, from the inside, of the little shiny knob; back swings the door, and you stand before Hannah Bye.

Sunlight falls upon the face of Hannah Bye, and as you glance along the open entry sunlight glimmers in from the opposite door. It

must pass through innumerable leaves and boughs to get there, and gives a leafy green rather than a golden reflection; but, still it dapples the tidy oil cloth and skims along the wall when the vines shake in the wind. Sunlight falls, too, on the warm south sides of the hayrick in the barn-yard, and dries the dew on the steaming planks of the barn. Sunlight finds out the glossy sides of early apples in the midst of dark apple trees; dives at the roots of yellow wheat; and touches open a host of morning-glories that climb for the down-looking windows. Sunlight is in the milk pails that hang in a row on the picket fence; sunlight is streaming down to the spring-house in the meadows; and sunlight is in Hannah Bye's blue eyes.

Whether there was also any shadow, coming or going, upon those gentle eyes; whether like the morning-glories, each had its hovering shadow, the person who has just opened the gate and lifted the knocker, and who now stands before them, cannot be expected to know. He might have rapped with a stout staff he carries; and he might have kept his hat on at a less seemly door, but the rigid neatness and order, the straight folds of the white blinds

at the lower windows and the spirit of self-possession that pervades the place, seemed to demand other conduct here.

His face cannot be seen,—except by the blue eyes of Hannah Bye,—from where he stands; but his back is indicative enough of his character, and the pack it supports of his calling. It is a straw hat he has lifted from his head, and as he sets down his pack to dry his forehead, dusty and wet from a long tramp in the sun, a short linen coat blows from his straight figure in the breeze, and the point of a blue necktie flutters across his shoulder. Although his boots are brown with dust, it is plain that they have been used to city thorough-fares.

He bows with too much grace for a mere ploughboy, and Hannah, albeit full of Quaker modesty, hesitates and, not blushes, but slightly stammers, as she asks:

"What will thee have, friend?"

By this time the traveller had undone his pack and taken out a gaudy book which he presented to her opened at a colored print. She took it a little awkwardly, as if, from fear and disinclination to look at it, she did not want to receive it at all; but with the ready wit of his

calling the book-vendor ignored this, and answered her question in his well-worn jargon:

"A household necessity, Miss. A hundred and fifty of these master-pieces of art. Each chapter written by a famous author. Not a dull word, not an inferior picture. All master-pieces. Everything new from title to tailpiece. 'The Heroes of the Bible.' Everybody wants it who sees it."

He turned over the gaudy pictures as she held the book timidly away from her; and rattled off the names of the neighbors who had subscribed.

"Perhaps friends of yours?" said he. "There's Mr. Hackett down at the store, and the landlord of the Button Ball Tavern, Davey Dove; old Mrs. Truepenny up by the toll-house, and Matchem the toll keeper himself. Doctor Paulding said he *must* have it, and Miss Blake, she took it right off."

Hannah was holding the book with her eyes fixed shyly upon the picture of a monstrous red Goliath going down under the stroke of a dwarfish David, and had shown no desire either to subscribe or to prolong the interview. She thought within herself that this was truly a

man of ready speech and of a handsome face; but her Quaker instincts told her that she must beware of these as of dark tempters, for she had been taught that what was seductive or fair was only good as it was dealt with in temperance.

But now that she heard the name of her friend Ruth Blake, her eyes, and a momentary eagerness, told the book-agent that he had at last found a favorable point of approach.

"You know Miss Blake, then," he said. "A sweet young lady. Dark eyes and black hair. Lives on the hill." He pointed away to the left, and Hannah could not repress a demure monosyllable of assent. She felt that these advances were wrong, and would have resented them had she known how; but his handsome face and innocently frank manner seemed so natural; he was, indeed, so used to being the friend of everybody, that she had not the will to turn away and shut the door in his face.

"Yes, I know Miss Blake, too," he said, and paused as if he expected Hannah to show some surprise. "Acquainted with her cousins Tom and Josh Darlington. They come in to market, you know, and I often meet 'em in town."

Hannah made no reply, but bent her head a trifle, just permitting him to go on. She knew the Darlingtons, had always known them, but she was anxious to give back the volume and get away, and she hoped the man would take the hint and go.

He, however, meant to sell his book, and moreover the blue eyes before him were very alluring. Not often in his wayfaring up and down the country of sweet-faced Quakeresses had he encountered so fair a countenance. He was young and handsome, she was full of a winning innocence. When business thus fell in with pleasure it was not surprising that he cared to linger.

"It was the Darlington boys first brought me out to this bit of country," he continued. "I haven't been on the road two weeks now, and sold nearly a hundred." He suggestively turned the leaves in Hannah's hands. "And Miss Blake, she has been very kind to a lonely book-agent. It was she suggested that you might like a copy,—or your mother, now, wouldn't she—"

There was a stir on the stair-landing above them, and then a stern woman's voice said:

"Hannah."

The girl looked upward with alarm and hastily closed the book. She stood for a moment hesitating whether to shut the door and seem ungentle to the vendor, or to go upstairs and leave him where he was. But indecision was itself a sin in that household, and before her fluttered mind could decide, or the book-vendor go on with his patter, there was a heavy step, a menacing step to an intruder, on the stairs, and hastening feet, planted with stolid precision, brought to the door over Hannah's shoulder, a homely, inflexible face with hard lips apart, whence came the stern question:

"What does thee want?" Then to Hannah: "Hannah, have I not warned thee to beware of these vanities?" and snatching the book from Hannah's hand, her mother, Deborah Bye, thrust it out to the owner.

"Go thy way with thy wares. We deal not in worldly trifles here. Go thy way."

The book-seller, slow to acknowledge defeat, made no motion to depart, but continued with easy effrontery to cry up his book.

"Madam, a religious work recommended by all the D.D's. 'Heroes of the Bible.' No re-

spectable family can afford to be without it."

He tried to thrust it into Deborah's hands; but she drew back as if from a poisonous thing, and pushing Hannah behind her shut the door in the canvasser's face. There was a suppressed passion concentrated about her lips; but she uttered no further word.

Standing there on the great stone slab, bareheaded and with the book in his hand, the canvasser lifted his eyes and peered up curiously at the windows above him. He meditated a moment and then stooping upon the steps, deposited the book in its place, closed his pack, shouldered it lightly, and finally turned away.

CHAPTER II

With a look backward half of amused contempt and half of hope that the pretty Quaker girl might be gazing after him, the canvasser turned through the white-washed gate into the long, shady lane; and the farm settled down to its day-long quietude.

Of human sounds there seemed none at all until the dinner hour, and even then they scarcely troubled the surface of the summer silence.

But noon passed, and afternoon, and with the first breath of cooler evening air a wicket in the great barn-door burst open and a little man, struggling with a laugh, burst out.

"No, thee didn't, 'Liza, takes a sharper hand to ketch me. That's a hymn book," he said.

'Liza poked her head through the door to look at him. She raised a finger of reproach, and puckered her rosy lips into a warning.

"Abbey, thee'll go to the bad place if thee hides in the barn and studies dance-tunes. If Deborah knew it, thee—"

"Sh-sh-sh," said Abbey, grasping her hand, with a quick look across at the three windows. Then he laughed like a good-natured wizard, and jigged a step or two in defiance.

"Where's Hannah goin'?" he asked.

"Down to Sycamore," said she, "and if thee don't burn that book of dance-tunes thee'll be read out of Meetin'—mark my words."

"But who dances to 'em?" retorted the little man taking her up in an elfish waltz. She snatched herself loose.

"Yes, but not at Deborah's farm."

This was an unanswerable argument, and without examining its logic, he made a fiendish face and went round the corner of the barn to the stable door.

Presently he came out leading an old white mare hitched to a faded wagon, and when Hannah got in she said,

"Drive to Hackett's, Abbey."

It was a mile by the pike down to Sycamore, through a land big with summer tilth and touched everywhere by comfortable human associations. Tranquil old homesteads of the colonial period, with endless acres stretching away at their back, bordered the road, and mid-

way between the Bye farm and the store was a white-washed toll house resting below the trees which gave the village its name. Sycamore, itself, was but a handful of houses, clinging about the store as if they had built against it in the manner of the bank swallow.

Hannah passed rapidly on to the counter and made her few purchases. With no more than a "Good evening," to Friend Hackett, she came demurely out.

Abbey was perched like a gnome on a barrel, listening to a story about a book peddler—

"You tell me he sold that there book to old Bill Carr?"

"Si says he did, and he ought to know."

"Well, if he did, he's stuck, that's all. Old Bill Carr never knowed no book but a bank-book in his life, an' what goes into that never comes out, nary a red."

Hannah's ears had caught this as she got into the carriage, and as Abbey turned to drive homeward she put a timid hand on the reins: "Wait, Abbey, there is time to go to Ruth's. Drive that way."

"But thee mother, Hannah."

It was a rare morsel of assumed virtue.

Hannah tacitly acknowledged that she was in the wrong, by explaining that she would stay only a minute. Hannah wanted to know what was said about the book canvasser; but she did not care to arouse Abbey's curiosity by asking him to tell her. She was as innocent of diplomacy as a lamb that wounds its head against a barbed fence when the gate stands open behind it.

Abbey was as much a gipsy as a Friend. He had the spirit of a strolling juggler in the body of a diminutive Quaker. He had come into Deborah Bye's family from an Orphans' Home, bringing the name of Abbott, and with all her force of education she had never been able to cast out his merry devil.

"Dan Shinn," said he, "was talkin' about some book peddler." Hannah showed no sign of interest, yet she was attentive. "He's been in the neighborhood since about third-day week, and sold a heap."

They were passing the Button Ball Tavern, under its shady group of big trees, with wagons tethered at the white-washed racks and a knot of farmers in the stone porch. There were

mutual nods between Abbey and several dusty-brown looking men.

"Ben stoppin' at the Button Ball." He was looking back as he talked. "But he's up at the Darlington boys' all the time. Darlington's going to have a harvest party."

Hannah did not speak. She glanced once through the open back of the wagon, then repressed herself. Presently Abbey pulled the mare up to a walk and turned into a steep lane which led to an old house on the hilltop. It was a farm encircled with shade trees from which one straight pine shot up.

It was twilight now, and Ruth Blake sat on the stationary bench running along the wall under the porch. Not far off sat Abel Howell, who had long been coupled with her in the mouth of gossip, and who, if the course of true love ran sufficiently smooth, would bear her off, some day soon, as mistress of his farm. He was a tall, gaunt, young fellow, whose face showed acquaintance with the harvest sun, and while it certainly bore the trait of country simplicity, there were good humor and good looks in plenty to compensate for a lack of shrewd-

ness. As Hannah Bye got out at the steps Ruth hurried to meet her.

"Why, Hannah," she said, with a kiss, "it has been days and weeks since I've seen thee. Where has thee been all this long time?"

"Where thee'd always find me if thee'd come oftener," said Hannah a little reproachfully.

Abel had got up on his long legs to make a social effort and he now bowed to Hannah with a slow bend of his head and reached out his great brown hand. She took it civilly, and when he got it back, he carefully concealed it in his pocket.

"We drove out to the store," Hannah explained, somewhat nervously, "and as there was time for just a word with thee, Ruth, I asked Abbey to come on here." She was wondering to herself whether such an excuse would satisfy her mother. Deborah's rule did not cease with her threshold. It followed her family forth and back to her gates. She was not averse to Hannah's friendship for Ruth, though she kept a jealous eye on it; but it was Hannah's duty to tell where she was going, and a departure from it met with stern disapproval.

"And right glad I am to see thee, Hannah," said Ruth. "Take off thy hat and rest a while. Thy mother knows thee's safe enough."

"Yes, safe enough, Ruth; but I did not say I was going so far, and she will be vexed. Thy father and mother trust thee more, but thee knows how it is with mother. Are Benjamin and Jane right well?"

"Yes, father and mother's both right smart," said Ruth. "They're indoors looking at the pictures in a book we just got, and Hannah, I sent the book-seller to thy house. Did thee see him?"

"Yes, Ruth, he came this morning," said Hannah. "Does thee know anything about him?" She was seeing again the curt dismissal from her mother's door.

"Why, truly, yes. He is a friend of Tom and Josh. They brought him up from town."

"But his name and his family?" asked Hannah.

"Why, for his name, that's Jarrett," said Ruth. "But for his family, I never asked him. Does thee know, Abel?"

"I s'pose he has one," said Abel in a slow nasal voice, "but so has your old white mare,

Hannah. I reckon the one knows just as much about it as the other." It was evident that Abel did not approve of the subject. He hitched his chair back and relapsed into a militant silence.

But Ruth was not to be put down in this summary manner. She had bought a book from the canvasser, he was a friend of her cousins, and more than all, Abel Howell disliked him. Was not this enough to warrant an interest in him? Abel, she thought, was developing an early tendency to dictation which it would be well to oppose, and besides the bookman was polite as well as good-looking. The contrast was against Abel.

"Tom and Josh know all about him," said Ruth, looking severely across her shoulder at Abel and speaking to Hannah, "and they will tell thee. On seventh-day night they are going to have a party. The watermelons are ripe, and the harvest's all in, and they've got the house to themselves now. Thee'll go, Hannah, won't thee?"

"No, Ruth," she said, with just a shade of regret. "I'd like to go, but thee knows how

mother is. She never would consent, and I mustn't think of it."

"But all thee neighbors will be there, Hannah. The boys have got the house to themselves since old Betsy Glass died, and they mean to have such a time! Jarrett will be there, and some friends of his from town, and there will be dancing and fiddling and a heap of nice things to eat. Thee surely must go, even if thee has to run away."

Hannah was shocked to hear Ruth say this, though she had come to look upon her as overworldly. There was, however, just the faintest element of admiration in Hannah's dismay, for Ruth with her small defiances of the pitiless convention which hemmed her in, had been an idol of Hannah's school days and was now the one solace of her rigid life.

"Thee knows, Ruth, I would not do that," answered Hannah with some reproach. "Nor thee, I hope, either."

Ruth gave her pretty head a toss. There was a girlish menace in her expression. She laughed and said:

"Thee's too much in earnest, Hannah; but

thee shall go, thee *shall* go, if I can help thee. But stay, now," she begged, as Hannah rose. "I've a great deal more to tell thee. Do stay!"

Hannah feared to linger, and reaching a hand to Abel, who had also risen, she turned to depart. But Abbey had to be hunted up, and while Abel went to find him Ruth asked:

"Did thee buy the book, Hannah?"

"No, Ruth, thee knows that no book but the Holy One and Penn's Maxims has ever had resting place in my mother's house. The man offended her with his speech and she shut the door upon him."

"But he meant no harm, Hannah. He has been here more than once, and Pappy says his book is true to Gospel." In her eagerness Ruth relapsed into the household name for her father.

"Yes, but his worldly tongue and dress, Ruth. It is dangerous to let such things gain on thee."

"Hannah, thee talks like thy mother. In her day it was so, maybe; but it's not in ours. The man is no monster, thee may take my word for it."

Just then Abel came around the house, with

Abbey at his heels leading the old mare.

"Abbey, is thy fiddle in practice?" asked Ruth with a knowing smile. Abbey looked furtively at Hannah, who was getting into the carriage. "We don't see enough of each other," he answered with a grin. "It's only on market days we dast to meet. Mr. Fiddle lives at Tom's and Josh's. I live at Deborah's." He shuffled into a nervous little jig.

"But you will come together to the party," said Ruth, reaching up to kiss Hannah goodbye.

Abbey answered with an unorthodox wink and a jerk of the head toward Hannah, which set Abel to laughing. Then he jumped in and they drove away.

CHAPTER III

Should she tell her mother that she had driven over to Ruth's or not? This was the thought that ran through Hannah's mind as Abbey and she started for home, and it troubled her throughout the ride. She knew that it would pain her mother to find that she had been disobeyed, and she knew that she must expect a reprimand that might bring tears;—but then the sense of concealment, would not that also be a trial?

To be sure Hannah did not think this all out as a casuist analyzes a fault into venial and criminal; but the thing lay in her mind like a dumb sensation, and with it was a vague dread that the book-vendor might somehow be divined by Deborah as the moving cause of the visit. It was not so, Hannah insensibly said to herself—but, then, suppose her mother should have a suspicion that it was so? Better say nothing about it, she seemed to hear her heart murmur.

But Abbey, the chatterbox, would he not tell 'Liza and she Deborah? Shame, Hannah saw, would thus be in store for her; and even on the score of policy, it seemed best to be honest. Hannah's simple mind, used to obeying the behests of an unreflecting purity, soon put from it the impulse to deception. She would say as little as possible, but still she must tell Deborah that she had driven over to Ruth's.

She was very quiet on the way home. Her head was busied with this problem: but she always felt more than usually demure after talking with Ruth. To hear about the gaieties among her neighbors made her ponder on the difference between them and herself. Why could they enjoy pleasures which were forbidden her? Why was Ruth Blake, her equal in piety and seemliness and in the regard of their common friends, permitted to have liberties and friendships which she was denied? When she and Ruth went to school together, not so many years before, she would not have dreamed of questioning her mother's precepts thus; but a difference had taken place since then both in Hannah and in her neighbors—and it is as hard to keep a young heart from

drifting with the current of the world, as to keep spring from the earth when the March snow has thawed.

When Abbey turned the old white mare into the buttonwood-bordered lane which led up to the house of Deborah Bye, he saw a team hitched before the door which both he and Hannah knew at a glance. It was a buggy of an old build, drawn by a venerable horse which looked as if he practised the theology of his driver. Abbey nudged Hannah and said:

"'Siah!"

"Yes," said Hannah, "we must go in quietly. Let me out at the gate and lead the horse straight on to the barn."

When this was done Hannah walked across the stone path and went indoors. There was a dim light and the sound of measured voices in the parlor, which was opened only on occasions when one of Deborah's grave associates came to see her. Hannah hesitated a moment at the door, but the flutter of her skirt caught Deborah's quick eye, and she bade her come in. Hannah entered timidly and was accorded a cold welcome by the visitor, a stout man with the sun-tanned face of a farmer,

clean shaven and stern of eye and mouth: a face that would have been handsome had it been allowed its natural play of expression and been freed from its surroundings of a straight velvet coat collar, a stiff white choker, and a beaver hat with a wide brim.

"Hannah, thee is not punctual at First-day meeting," he said, glancing severely at her and neither rising nor offering his hand. "Last First-day thee was late. Punctuality is a seemly virtue in women, and thee must not neglect thy duty."

Deborah frowned at her daughter. She also had chidden her for this fault, and she took satisfaction that her words were now reinforced. Hannah bowed her head in obedience and merely said:

"I mean to be more punctual, Josiah."

She hesitated just an instant. Should she tell her mother now, that she had driven over to see Ruth? No, it would only bring forth further reproof. She would wait till to-morrow. Then she bade them good-night and went up to her room.

It was Deborah Bye's method to conduct her household and the affairs of her farm without

confiding her plans to either her daughter or to her dependents. She herself went and came without question, and her domestic directions were received as irrevocable laws. If now and then she told Hannah of any of her plans or explained where she was going, or how long she might be away, it was for her own convenience, not to satisfy Hannah's curiosity. She often was away for short periods upon visits to Friends of neighboring Meetings; for Deborah was a preacher of recognized power, and her ministrations were much in request among the nearby Friends.

At breakfast the next morning she bid Hannah hurry up some sewing she was at work upon, saying that Friend Josiah Vogdes had come last night to invite her over to Dugdale Meeting on the next First-day, and that she meant to start the day before.

"It is a good smart ride, thee knows, and I should be too tired to speak, if I did it on First-day morning. So I shall go over Seventh-day afternoon, and thee must be done with my frock by then."

Hannah had come down stairs with the confession of her disobedient ride upon her lips.

To her the trifling fault was by its concealment growing into a sinful burden; but her mother had not given her a chance to tell it, and now this news of Deborah's departure from home on the very day of the party at Darlingtons sent her thoughts flying in another direction. Then she began to fear that Abbey, an imp of Satan, might speak about the visit before she could acknowledge it. But Deborah left the table and relieved her from this anxiety.

Hannah said demurely:

"Abbey, let me tell mother about our ride to Ruth's. Thee mustn't say anything."

Abbey's mouth was full. He sputtered out:

"All right—but I wouldn't be in her shoes, Hannah. She'll catch it!" Then he got up and imitating Deborah's stride and gestures, marched straight through the kitchen door, without heeding Hannah, who went up stairs to her sewing.

She worked diligently at her mother's dress through the remaining three days, and when Saturday came she was quite ready, but she had not yet spoken of the visit to Blakes. Deborah put on her new frock without comment, by which Hannah knew that she was pleased,

and when Abbey brought out the buggy with her own sleek horse in the shafts, she was ready to get in. She gave some household directions, then said good-bye and drove down the lane into the pike.

Abbey stood watching her with his thumbs in his suspenders until she disappeared, then he turned suddenly to Hannah.

"Going, Hannah?" he said, pointing down toward Darlingtons, and with a significant movement of his head. His quick instinct had jumped at Hannah's thoughts, and he surprised her into an answer which showed that he was right.

"Has thee been brought up to such ways in this house?" she said. "It is wrong for me to go and for thee, and neither of us must think of it." Then she went in.

Abbey tossed down the mare's hay, set the barn in order, and did the needful work over at the house, then whistling a shrill dance tune sauntered out the lane in token of the temporary respite.

Presently he came trudging back beside the front wheel of a wagon driven by Ruth Blake. They were talking together as they entered the

door yard, and hearing their voices Hannah came to the door to see who it was.

Ruth, with little hope of success, had come over to plead with Deborah that Hannah might go to the party, but when she learned from Abbey that Deborah had gone away from home for the night she fairly laughed for happiness.

"Why, then, she can just jump right in and go 'long with me now," she said; and seeing Hannah on the doorstep she called, "Hurry up, get thee things quick; I've come to take thee to the party." Then, as she drove nearer, "What good luck Deborah's gone. Thee'd never have got off, but I meant to do my best to make her let thee go. Come, make thyself ready directly."

With a smile of welcome Hannah took Ruth's hand, then looking her reproof, she said:

"No, Ruth, I must not go; but come in a moment and have a glass of water and a fan. Thee's hot."

Ruth, declaring that Hannah must go, that she *would* take her, that it was an everlasting shame thus to imprison herself, got down from the wagon with Abbey's help and they all went

into the room which served for meals, for visitors, for household duties and every purpose short of a wedding or a funeral, or Deborah's gravest guests.

Hannah reached a palm-leaf fan from the tall and narrow mantel-shelf above the open hearth, and went to the pump for a glass of water. Abbey lounged in the broad window-seat swinging his short legs, and Ruth sat down in one of the ancient spindle-leg chairs, chatting away without cessation on the purpose of her visit.

"Why, Hannah, I can't see what's to prevent," she said, fanning herself rather to give emphasis to her words than to cool her rosy face, "thee mother'll never know—and if she does thee can say that as she wasn't here to be asked thee just went without asking. She'd not object to that—thee can tell her as soon as she comes back, and in the meantime thee will have been to thee first party! It's a sight not to be missed, I can tell thee. Besides music," she nodded toward Abbey, "and dancing, there will be a fine supper; and everybody's going. What harm can there be? Thy neighbors are no greater sinners than thee, and all

of them will be there. Thee *must* go. Come, go up and get thee things," and she rose and tried to lead Hannah to the door.

Hannah sat looking up at Ruth with mild blue eyes half smiling at her persistence and said:

"Thank thee, Ruth; thank thee for all thy pains; but I must not, I could not."

"But, Hannah, think," urged Ruth growing more excited as the plan she thought so clever seemed to be failing. "Think what thee is losing, just for nothing at all. Such another chance may not come till thee's gray; and that'll be soon enough if thee chains thyself to the door-sill like this."

She put her arms around Hannah's shoulders and, kissing her, tried to lift her to her feet, half caressingly, half in earnest; but Hannah was steadfast. Ruth began to feel a trifle hurt at her stolidity. She was trying to do her a benefit, to give her what she considered a great pleasure. She drew back now and asked once more with just a touch of coldness:

"Hannah, does thee really mean to stay at home?"

"Yes, Ruth, I am sorry to vex thee, but I must," said Hannah.

"Then there is no use for me to urge thee any further," said Ruth, and turning about with some show of spirit she bid her a brusque good-bye and went out, followed by Abbey.

Hannah got up and went wistfully about her household tasks till twilight,—the long twilight of the mid-summer. She set the table for supper and helped 'Liza in the kitchen. Then the cows came up from the meadow, driven by Abbey with shouts loud and long enough for a cavalry raid, and she went out to the barnyard to do her share of the milking.

Neither 'Liza nor Abbey alluded to the party; but she knew they both meant to go. Hannah went over and over the subject, pro and con, to the rhythm of the milk in the pan. "Yes or no, yes or no," it seemed to say, and then after one argument it would be "Yes, yes—" but another would arise and change it to "No, no, no."

Her conscience listened like a court of justice to the speeches of duty and desire. All she had endured of seclusion and hard conventional law rose up and urged her to go. But

habit and a gentle love of obedience, and her native simplicity which led her to care less for such gaieties than girls of Ruth's temper, pleaded that she should hold to her choice and stay at home. Then she pictured to herself the pleasant lamp-lighted scene, the jolly dances, with Abbey at the fiddle. She went over those who would be present and wondered what dress each girl would wear. Truly, as Ruth had said, they were in no wise worse than she. They went to Meeting, were honest and faithful enough, and why could they go and she not?

She carried her pan of milk to the stone-paved spring-house, and then went in to supper, still full of divided thoughts. After a few hasty mouthfuls Abbey and 'Liza got up and left her at the table. She quietly finished her meal, but she could not help hearing, through the open windows, every movement made by Abbey over at the stable, and she knew very well when he had hitched up, and gone to the garret to put on his holiday suit.

Then she herself arose firmly, as if spurred by a sudden resolution. She went to her room and dressed in the gown and bonnet she was

accustomed to wear to First-day Meeting: a drab frock and bodice with a cool kerchief of white lawn crossed about her throat and bosom. Her bonnet was of brown straw and closed her musing face in with its darker rim and the slender inner border of white ruffle as with a frame made by nature for the fair portrait it surrounded. She carried a small brown shawl on her arm and came slowly down stairs, putting on her black lace half-mittens. When Abbey had brought the team up to the doorstep she stood on the threshold ready to get in.

"I mean to go, Abbey," was all she said.

He received the news with a prolonged low whistle and a sidewise stare at Hannah, but said not a word.

'Liza then came from the kitchen and got in on the back seat, beside Hannah. She smiled, with a sly toss of her pretty head toward Hannah, as she exchanged glances with Abbey in stepping up; but asked no questions.

When they were comfortably seated Abbey touched the old mare with the whip, and they started at a leisurely walk down the lane.

CHAPTER IV

The Darlington farm-house stood back from the road at the end of a by-lane bordered here and there with cedars. The house was screened from view by a grove of firs, thick with dark green foliage to the ground. There was a porch toward the road, and here, as Abbey drove up in the dusk, the movements of some figures against the lighted door and windows could be seen through the chinks of the fir trees. A murmur of voices also crept out, despite the thud of the hoofs.

Abbey landed Hannah and 'Liza at the house door and went off to hitch his team among the dozen others about the stable yard. Hannah was confused by the unwonted light and laughter. She stood a moment in the shadow of the honeysuckle which clambered over the door, half-repenting that she had come. There was a noisy cluster of guests in the hallway, hanging up hats or stowing away shawls, among whom, under the swinging oil lamps she caught

glimpses of several of her neighbors. She shrank back as 'Liza tried to urge her in: but just then another team drove up, and she was carried forward in spite of herself.

The house was divided in the center by the hallway, with a parlor on the right hand, the long windows of which opened on the porch; and the living-room and kitchen, with a lessening group of out buildings in the direction of the barnyard, on the left. Hannah could see through the parlor door, as she stood with 'Liza in the hall, and her timid eyes fell upon one after another of her friends seated on the hair-cloth sofa and chairs or on the broad old window seats; or standing in a group which overflowed into the porch. Most of the girls were dressed in white with gay sashes, and some few had door-yard roses in their hair or at their waists; but there was a sprinkling of quaker gray and brown, unadorned saving by the smooth folds of decorously parted hair. The men in their unaccustomed clothes and stiff collars, which brought out the deep tan to a fiery redness, were but a dark patch of no definite color in the midst of the fluttering tints. The yellow glow of several oil lamps

intermixed with candles fused all this together into such a scene as Hannah had never hitherto beheld. It quite dazzled her with its brilliancy; but the very pleasure which it brought her was a source of dread to her. What right had she to be there in all that worldly bustle, amid that show of unseemly color, those forward manners and boisterous voices? She felt like escaping, and longed to be in the dark roads and under the quiet stars again. And yet, in her heart, she wanted to linger.

Presently she saw Thomas Darlington coming toward her, laughing with one group, and cutting up some ungainly caper with another until he had nearly reached the door where she stood. He was a tall young fellow with a good humored face which was now encompassed by a jolly grin that reached from the tuft of bristly whisker under one ear, across his clean shaven mouth to the balancing tuft under the other. He would have been more at ease, perhaps, though less in party trim, if he had discarded his black ribbed coat of the cutaway pattern for his accustomed shirt sleeves.

When he saw Hannah half hidden in the

doorway, he bounced forward at her and took her hand in his great brawny grasp.

"Well, I do declare, if here ain't Hannah Bye after all," he said. "And 'Liza too. Ruth told us thee wasn't coming, Hannah. I'm mighty glad thee's here. Take off thee bonnet awhile, and I'll go find her."

He turned away through the gathering crowd, and 'Liza, espying an acquaintance, went off on her part, leaving Hannah alone by the door. One or two girls spoke to her as they went into the parlor, but so little was she in the mood to respond that her answers silenced their levity, and they passed on to livelier companions.

It was not very long before Thomas came back with Ruth. Hannah could hear him say: "Here she is, I tell thee, by the door." Ruth took it for one of his jokes; but as she approached, laughing incredulously, she caught a glimpse of Hannah and leaped forward with both hands stretched out to welcome her.

"Why, now, that's sensible," she said, giving Hannah a kiss, and untying her bonnet strings. "Thee'll have such a time!" and with

one arm around her waist, she drew her through the parlor toward the porch.

Hannah thought she had never seen Ruth look sweeter than in her white dress with yellow roses; but her black eyes fairly seemed to crackle with a blaze of excitement and she fanned herself as if the action was a needed relief to her nerves. Hannah, in her timid way, half withdrew from her clasping arm with a sort of fear. For the moment Ruth had become a type of the careless, sinful outside world which was so alluring to ponder over and wish for, but so strange and dreadful in reality. What if Ruth were lost in it, betrayed by its fascinations into unknown evil? The thought almost brought a warning to Hannah's lips. For the moment the exhorting spirit of her mother came upon her, and she hardly restrained herself from calling aloud upon all the revellers to abandon their light ways and depart before the anger of the Lord should overtake them.

But Ruth, quite unconscious of all this, tightened her embrace as Hannah drew back, and led her with gentle force into the porch.

Hannah could see a tall man's figure with a breadth of white shirt-front rise as they came forward, but she could not in the sudden dusk make out his features nor those of the group seated about him.

"Hannah, this is Mr. Jarrett," said Ruth, "Mr. Jarrett, Hannah Bye." She could not bring herself to say Miss. It would have seemed almost ridiculous, even profane to speak of Hannah so.

"So this is Miss Bye," said Jarrett with pleasant assurance. "We parted so suddenly at our last meeting," he went on with a laugh, "that I had no chance to say good-bye; and now the good-bye is turned into a how d'ye do. Here's a chair, Miss Bye; take mine," and he handed Hannah his chair and lounged with his arms crossed on the back. As there was no alternative Hannah was forced to sit down, while he leaned over behind her ready to talk to her when she had greeted the rest. She shrank from his touch, bending forward in the chair and speaking demurely to each of her friends in turn; yet she was secretly interested to hear his voice and watch his movements, so different from those of the young fellows about

him. Even his white shirt-front had a queer fascination for her; and she felt her timidity giving way to unconquerable curiosity. But there was a repulsion under the superficial attraction, for he represented to her the force she could not name which had changed Ruth and was, she thought as she glanced about her, slowly creeping over the whole countryside.

"You don't see much life up at your house, Miss Bye," he began now.

"Does thee think so?" said Hannah with the dread of her mother's anger in her heart. What if Deborah knew she was actually holding friendly converse with the man she had driven from her door?

"Well, your little fiddler tells me he has to keep his fiddle down at Tom's and Josh's. Your people are not fond of music, it seems."

Hannah did not notice the pleasantry. She hardly knew what she was saying. "We indulge in no worldly amusements," was her reply.

He laughed in his genial way, as he would have done were he successfully selling a book.

"And a party don't count?" he said.

Hannah was confused thus to have en-

trapped herself. She felt a blush starting over her face and she could not help smiling nervously. But just then the fiddle struck up a polka within doors, and everybody rose.

"Come, there's the music. Let's go in," said Ruth, leading the way with Abel Howell. The girls shook out their dresses and gave a light touch to ribbons and hair, then filed in, followed by all the men.

It was a lively scene such as the prim old parlor, in all its century of habitation had never before welcomed to its cool quietude. Abbey, seated above the rest, in a chair elevated upon a box, was fiddling away with his ear bent down to the strings, and a complete abandonment to the monotonous tune. Joshua Darlington and Lydia Paulding, the doctor's daughter, were already spinning around, and were soon followed by Hackett's girl, as she was called among the elder generation, meaning the storekeeper's daughter, and Tobias Dove, whose father kept the Button Ball Tavern. Led by these the dancing became general, and Hannah, seated near one of the porch windows watched it with a sort of inward protest which yet did not seem to turn

her eyes away nor to abate her sympathy with the pleasure of the dancers.

Ruth danced for a while with Abel Howell, then came over and sat beside Hannah. She was radiant with happiness, and snatched the palm leaf which Abel brought, as if her rosy cheeks were consuming her. She leaned close to Hannah's ear and whispered the evening's gossip.

"Does thee see that girl over there—talking now to Tom Darlington? She came out with Jarrett. Her name's Loveledge. She's a city friend of his."

Hannah looked across the room, and saw a young woman whom she had already noted as a stranger. She was dressed in a low-necked silk gown and wore long white gloves reaching to her elbows. Hannah's feminine instinct told her that Miss Loveledge's clothes were of a city fashion, and that she wore them with a style quite unusual among her own plain friends; but that they lacked the simplicity of the sweet white lawns and plain drabs of the others was quite as evident.

Hannah could see that the book-canvasser went up to Miss Loveledge at that moment and

asked her to dance. They glided several times around the room, then he brought her over to where Ruth and Hannah were sitting, and introduced her. Abel got up from behind Ruth, and gave Miss Loveledge his seat with something of a bad grace; whereupon Mr. Jarrett, appearing to have attained his end, asked Ruth to dance.

They slid into the group of revolving couples and Hannah was left alone beside the strange girl. She watched Ruth and her partner as they tripped past her once or twice; but now she lost them and quietly waited for them to return.

Return they did not, however, for when they had danced twice about the room Ruth grew so warm that she asked to be taken outside, and as they were near the door opposite Hannah, they went into the hall and, gaily talking, strolled out to the old garden paths before the house. There were other couples and groups seated about in the reflected light from indoors, chatting and laughing gaily, and Ruth would have sat down on the grass among these; but Mr. Jarrett arrested her arm as she was about to do so, and they laughed together

as she looked up at him with mock anger. He did not let go, but said:

"Come, let's get an apple. Here's the orchard over here."

Lightly Ruth stepped up and went across the carriage road to the orchard. There was a rail fence to climb, and she put her foot on the lowest bar to step across; but before she could swing her weight up Jarrett had her in his arms and lifted her to the top rail. She laughed at his quickness and tried to jump down on the other side; but he held her firmly with an arm about her waist. She struggled and laughed again. Then he released her and vaulted over to her side.

They wandered on under the even roof of the branches farther and farther from the light, now and again reaching down for an apple. Ruth found one which tasted so delicious that she fairly danced with delight.

"Take a bite," she said, holding it coquettishly toward Mr. Jarrett. "It's like sugar."

"Umph," said he, unctuously, as he bit a piece off; and with his mouth still full: "But it was just this way Eve tempted Adam. Now, don't, Miss Blake, drive a poor fellow out of

Paradise just as he's crossed the fence."

Ruth was getting used to such speeches from Jarrett; but still her formal Quaker ways made her a trifle at fault. She was deficient in humor and took every word as a verity. The picturesque in language she knew nothing of. Figures of speech were as hard to understand as fractions; and light-raillery had hitherto been to her, heavy nonsense. But now that her companion appealed to her with a Biblical parable, she could better understand him.

"They were driven out for sin," she said. "We have done no wrong, unless dancing is, and as long as my conscience is clear, I don't believe it is—for me. But thee already has a sweetheart, Mr. Jarrett. Won't she be jealous if thee deserts her?" Ruth looked at him archly with her black eyes which he could see glistening in the darkness. Instinct wants but a little favoring cultivation, and it begins to bud in the most unexpected places. The woman was strong in Ruth, and she was fast learning the language of look and gesture.

"Oh, sweetheart—well, that's so; but it takes two to make a bargain, and a fellow's never sure of himself till the knot's tied." He

laughed as he said this with just a shade of self-justification, as if he were trying to convince himself as well as satisfy Ruth.

They turned here into a little cart-road that ran a few paces to the right, then went back toward the house. The far-away light shed a dim glow upon the end opposite to them and left them in even greater darkness than when they were strolling in the other direction; but those clustered about the grass by the door, if they had cared to cease their chatter, could plainly have seen Ruth's white dress against the background of the night.

CHAPTER V

Hannah looked at Miss Loveledge askance and inwardly felt that she did not like her. There was a boldness in her countenance and in the carriage of her head and shoulders which shocked Hannah's simple modesty, and yet it is doubtful if she should have noted it had the girl's shoulders been covered. This was a degree of wantonness which, to Hannah, vitiated every feature; but if she were pressed for the truth she must have acknowledged that Miss Loveledge was good-looking, even handsome —yet why was it she was not lovely? The analysis ran too far afield, and Hannah thought again that she could not tell why, but she knew that she did not like her.

"You live out here, I suppose, Miss Bye?" she said in a winning tone.

Hannah answered politely that she did; but made no motion to turn her chair for further conversation. This, however, did not discourage Miss Loveledge. She drew her seat up to Hannah's and tried to make much of her,

asking many questions about the country, the people, and the dancing. This led her at last to speak of Ruth, and a new eagerness was visible as she pressed the subject.

"Her father is still living, then, and works the farm? Has she any brothers and sisters? I've heard so much about her, you know, that I am interested."

"She has no brothers or sisters," answered Hannah.

"And beaux—she must have plenty of beaux?" Miss Loveledge looked gaily and suggestively in Hannah's face. "I hear she is to be married soon?" She watched Hannah keenly as she answered.

"Yes, she is going to marry Abel Howell; but when, I cannot say."

Miss Loveledge showed no especial interest in hearing this; but the questions ceased now, and she began to look hither and thither for her partner.

"How long he stays," she said presently. "They are not dancing, are they?"

Hannah looked at the passing couples. "No, they are not dancing." She, too, began to feel an unwonted anxiety.

"Come," said Miss Loveledge, at last, "let's find them," and taking Hannah's arm they got up.

They paced back and forth through the porch once or twice, and Miss Loveledge peered into the dark foliage of the fir trees. They could see the dim outline of figures approaching, and presently could hear voices above the music, and now and then a silvery laugh, mingled with masculine tones. Hannah could feel a tightening of Miss Loveledge's hand on her arm, and she was drawn to watch her intensely eager face. Her body was almost poised as if to spring forward on the figures, but as they came within the radius of the house-lights the girl's dress was seen to be pale pink, and in an instant Miss Loveledge's attention relaxed.

"It's some one else," she muttered in disappointment; and when the strolling pair had passed, she drew Hannah into the house, where a new dance had begun.

When the dance was over, the dining-room was thrown open. Under its low ceiling, hung with yellow, pink and blue tissue paper, whose perforated edges did double service as decora-

tion and fly screen, stood a long table loaded with the fruitful wealth of the mid-year, cantaloupes, early apples and pears, and great rosy watermelons cut into tulip shapes. There was a barrel of cider on tap in the shed outside the kitchen door; and there were abundant home-made cakes and pies beside; but this was a feast of the harvest, and what was not born of the homestead fields made small appeal to those who had tilled them and seen their rich fruits mature.

With a murmur of pleasure, which was neither laughter nor speech, but a mingling of both the crowd of men and girls came thronging in, occupying every corner; then when the room was full the feast overflowed into the hall, the parlor and the porch, while some groups seated themselves on the grass outside. Hannah and her companion whom she would willingly have parted with, but that she began to feel some sympathy for her, found seats in the broad window-ledge of the dining-room, and presently Thomas Darlington with a plate of watermelon in each hand came up, offering each a slice.

"Has thee had some?" he said. "No?

There, see that! Looks like a cool sunset, and it'll taste like morning dew!"

He reached himself a slice from the table and sat down between them on the floor, bending his mouth into the juicy edge and relishing it with a grunt of extreme gusto. Hannah and Miss Loveledge used forks; but not a few of the girls plunged headlong into the pink slices and laughed at themselves and their neighbors with great bulging cheeks full of the sweet core.

Now and then some one shot a seed across the room, and at every happy hit there rose a loud hurrah and screams of enjoyment. When this had become general and the more decorous stages of the party had passed Thomas Darlington stole up behind Bella Hackett who, with smothered laughter was trying to drop a wet seed down his brother's back, and retaliated by washing her face with the watermelon rind. This was the last delightful stage of riotous fun without which no harvest dance is complete. In an instant a dozen lively girls, laughing and screaming, scattered before the pursuing lads each carrying a juicy rind. They ran hither and thither about the house

and into the barnyard, while all the rest roared at the fun and egged on the boys who were outstripped or held at bay with screams and scratches.

Just as this began Hannah felt a touch upon her sleeve from the window behind and looking round quickly, saw Abel Howell in the dark garden outside the window. He raised a warning finger, then whispered to her without showing himself, and presently she slipped down from her seat. Miss Loveledge was too much engrossed with the wild hubbub about her to notice Hannah's movements; and without telling her that she was going, Hannah slipped out through the kitchen door and joined Abel in the brick-paved kitchen porch.

CHAPTER VI

Though Ruth was enjoying the novelty of her flirtation with the good-looking and city-bred book-agent, she was careful to keep well within the seemly limits of her sect. She had never before known the sly delights of even so tame a dalliance as this, and yet the generations of austerity behind her kept no light hold upon her will.

She had gathered another apple or two and they listened to the music floating down through the boughs; but at the louder mirth which now began Ruth was for strolling in toward the house. She had got a step or so in advance when Jarrett dropped his arm about her waist to arrest her. Ruth turned a circle in sliding away from his clasp, and as she glanced backward, saw the clear outline of a rather excited figure approaching through the trees. It was Abel Howell, with Hannah a step behind him. If Ruth had obeyed her first impulse to run up to Abel and take his arm

there would have been no trouble. She could manage him perfectly. But the coquettish sentiments born of so romantic a stroll as she had just taken, the attention of a cavalier with citified manners and evening clothes, were rather calculated to turn her head for the moment and she did a very foolish thing. Instead of taking Abel's arm she took Mr. Jarrett's and making a show of independence at Abel's espionage, walked away from him.

Abel was a rustic person, but he had a big courageous heart, and he loved Ruth. He pushed forward and took Jarrett by the shoulder. Jarrett turned and they stood face to face.

Abel pointed to Ruth. "She's to be my wife, and you have no right to touch her. Go on now, or you'll be sorry for it," and he gestured out toward the light with a big menacing hand. Jarrett smiled in a superior way, and laughed with an inclination toward Ruth.

"Seems you've got an owner, Miss Blake. When did he buy you?"

"When the devil was buying you," said Abel, hot at his impudence, "and only for the sake of Ruth, I'd send you down to him with

a broken head. Get on, now," and he pointed threateningly with one hand while he took Ruth's arm in the other. "Come, Ruth," he said, "thee must come away. I mayn't be as good company as him, but I'm safer for thee."

Ruth had watched the two with several emotions. After all Abel was a man, a big, good honest man, and she couldn't help admiring his courage. Jarrett evidently respected him beneath his assumption of amused contempt. Her heart was a safer guide than her head, she felt, but she was not going to give Abel the upper hand.

"Abel, thee acts like a jealous husband. Thee'd better be dancing with some nice girl than mooning about with such thoughts in thy head. Come, let's go in." They turned up the lane toward the light but Abel held Ruth back, and Jarrett with a light laugh and a wave of the hand paced on.

"What a fool thee made of me, Abel," said Ruth. "He meant no harm—"

"Neither did old Dobson's cow when she cornered Sis Dobson in the truck patch—yet there was danger, and I think thee'd better go home now, Ruth."

"Go home, indeed! And why should I go home?"

"Because, I'm going, and thee'll have no company." Ruth had a harsh answer on her lips; but just then she turned and saw Hannah Bye standing where she had stopped and seeming to be held fast by grief.

"Hannah," said Ruth, "has thee been there all this time?"

Hannah could not have answered if the Meeting had issued a decree that she was to speak. She was literally struck dumb by what she had seen and heard and, though there was far down in her being, a sort of unholy admiration of her friend who had thus broken through the hard traditions of her race, yet Hannah was shocked beyond utterance.

Ruth went up to her: "Hannah, I hope thee's not sick?" Ruth's gesture made Hannah think that she meant to embrace her. Hannah gently put away her hands. She could not possibly be touched by one who was soiled by the world in the person of Jarrett. With eyes cast down and head half averted she said at last:

"Don't, Ruth—I must go home. Abel, will

thee find Abbey? I must go home. I must go immediately."

"Why, what's the matter, Hannah?" asked Ruth. "Thee's hardly seen anything, has thee?"

"Oh, Ruth—I have seen—I must go home—at once, please."

"Come along, Ruth," said Abel. "Let's all go together. Our carriage is hitched near Hannah's. You girls get in, and I'll find Abbey."

"But wait," said Ruth. "I'm not going yet. The fun's just beginning. Thee's foolish, Abel. He meant no harm. He—"

"Ruth!" Hannah's heart was made eloquent by her conscience. "Ruth," she said in a sterner and louder voice than she ever used —"Thee shall not stay longer in this den of lions. I must snatch thee from the beasts and pluck thee from the firebrands. The steps of hell are at thy feet and the way is open to thy destruction." As she spoke her eyes burned in the dark and her voice took on the sing-song of an exhorter. "Ruin will seize thee, and thy feet will walk the way of sinners—Oh, Ruth—"

But Ruth was not going to lose the fun she had just begun to taste.

"Why, Hannah," she said, "what ails thee? I never saw thee like this before. Come in and see them dance. Thee can't take Abbey home. He's making the music. The party can't go on without him. Come." Ruth tried to take Hannah's arm. But she stood rigid, with her mother's austere eyes and an uplifted look in her face as of one who had seen visions of the future and was oblivious of the present.

"Well, I can't help it," said Ruth, with a wry mouth and tears coming—"I shan't go home till I've seen some more of the party and had something to eat. If Hannah won't stay, you take her, Abel, and Abbey will take me."

Thus saying, Ruth turned toward the house. Abel followed her and took her by the arm. "Ruth," he said, "does thee forget the seat by the great rock, and my asking thee and thy consent and the kiss that sealed it—? Ruth, Ruth—Don't—it'll break my heart—it'll break—"

"Why, Abel, thee's silly. I mean no harm; no disloyalty to thee. Thee makes it so ridiculous that if I went with thee I'd feel a goose.

Come on in; or if thee won't, just take Hannah home and come back."

Ruth went into the house, and Abel turned to Hannah:

"Hannah," he said, "she has left us. You come to the carriage. I'll go look for that fellow and get even with him—"

"No, Abel, no, no, no!" said Hannah. "No —that would be worse still. Come—come with me. Thee must not repay injury with injury. Come, we will go home—"

Abel was dazed. She took his arm and led him to her carriage. He got in mechanically and took the lines. She was up beside him instantly, and the old mare, schooled to the roads, took her own way home.

CHAPTER VII

The days that followed were rather hard ones for Ruth. She felt that she had done no wrong; but she was deserted by her lover, and of Hannah she had not a syllable of news.

Abel took his fate bitterly. He tried to forget it behind the plough and in the cow-yard, where he had twenty head of cows to milk morning and evening. But somehow the events of that night were repeated in the thud of the hoof, and in the tune of the milk pail, and his mind was sore with brooding on his ill fate. Everything he did served as a refrain to the song of woe.

Then, when all seemed hopeless, up the farm lane came Abbey with a sort of skip and jump and a tune to match. He was afoot, which in itself was a kind of omen of either good or evil. He saw Abel in the milk-yard, and called to him.

"Hi, Abe; did thee see anything o' our white-face bull? He's broke out o' pasture—"

Abe leaned over the picket fence among the milk-pans till Abbey drew near.

"No, I ain't seen a bull like Deborah's—how long's he ben out?"

"Oh, why, just now—this morning. I was in the shed and I heard somebody a hollowin' like mad. So I skips 'round, an' away down on the pint, where the creek makes almost an island was that feller that sells books, an' our white-faced bull was tossin' up grass an' earth on the little neck of land that saves the pint from bein' a island."

"What's that—hold thee breath, Abbey. That feller that sells books. He was at thy place?"

"So I skipped down hill to see what was goin' to happen, an'—"

"At Deborah's place, did thee say?"

"The book-man, yes. He had a big red book under his arm and he'd walk up clost to the bull and try to bribe him with bunches of grass. Then the bull'd see the red book and rear about, and the feller'd run for the pint. Would a made you split to see it. But when I went to coax the bull away, he was so mad

he made right over the fence and up the road, this way."

"And what became of Jarrett?" said Abel, alert, now, for news which through the past week he had beguiled himself to believe he could never care for again.

"Oh, he went up Sycamore-way toward 'Siah's farm. Well, if you ain't seen the bull I'll skip along."

And Abbey turned a cart wheel in the grassy lane and was far down at the white gate into the pike before Abel could collect his thoughts.

Should he go to Ruth's and head Jarrett off, or should he go to Hannah's and find out what took him there? He tossed up these problems like a rather clumsy juggler, a long time,—first idly, then to the tune of the milk-pail. He was nearly through his morning's job and would be free then to drive to either farm. Which way?

The question is a deep one for all of us at every corner of the bisecting streets of life; but for Abel it was a crisis. Suppose he found Jarrett at Ruth's? Of course, he never contemplated results. A soul under stress of the

jealousies of love, never can. But, if Jarrett were there—how bitter, how tragic!

All this was in Abel's mind in a boiling sort of indecision. He could not analyze his feelings; all he knew was that he felt miserable and wanted to purge his confused and brooding head. There was nobody at his own farm to whom he could confide his troubles; no companion of his own age. His father was a Friend as rigid as a post in a rail-fence—with this difference, that you could lean against a rail-fence for support, but no one ever found even that much negative sympathy in Parmenas Howell. He was as stiff as the brim of his Quaker hat; and as colorless as the drab of his ancient dress.

Abel, like almost all of us, chose at last by impulse. He hitched up and drove to Deborah's. As he lifted timidly the bright brass knocker, and glanced above at the three green-shaded windows his mind was vacant of words to say to Hannah. How should he explain his visit at that unusual hour? His heart smote him. But he was not long in doubt, for 'Liza threw the door back with a great sweep and stood with the knob in her hand saying:

"No trimmings! no tin pans! no books! no—wh—y, Abel Howell, what's thee here for at milking time? I thought it was a tinker or a—"

Abel would have been speechless, but the word "books" set free his tongue.

"It's well for thee, 'Liza, there's no books to steal thy thoughts. Where's Hannah?"

"Moulding butter—down at the spring-house."

"I'll go down to her—where's Deborah?"

"Up to Sycamore; she'll be back soon."

Abel went through the wicket gate and down the flat-stone pathway to the spring-house under the over-shading white buttonwoods. There was Hannah busy with the new-made butter in clean golden nuggets. She was bending over the stone-shelf and did not see Abel.

"Hannah," he said gently.

She turned in demure surprise: "Why, Abel—what's the matter?" Remembrance of that unhappy night made her apprehensive.

"Nothing, Hannah. I want to talk to thee."

Hannah tucked up her chintz apron and sat down on the stone rim of the spring. Abel took a seat beside her.

"Hannah, I don't know what to do. Ruth has not sent me a single word, and I am sick with trouble. What would thee do if thee was me?"

"Abel, I'd go to Ruth and forgive and forget. Thee loves her; she loves thee. Perhaps she meant no harm, tho' my ways are not her ways; perhaps she repents."

"Has thee seen her since the party, Hannah?"

"No, Abel; I have worn sackcloth in repentance, and my sin is not yet atoned."

"Has thee told Deborah?"

"She knows it—"

"Knows that Ruth and I are—"

"Knows that I walked with conscious knowledge into the paths of evil—"

"She does? How did she find it out?"

"I could not add to wrong-doing by concealing it; I told her."

"Told her; but why? She must have been terrible."

Hannah would not betray her mother. She had found her terrible as an injured God, with wrath that was more fateful than the lightning of Jove, because it was more personal. But

it took no form of bodily violence. It had moral terrors too deep for expression or action. Hannah changed the subject.

"Go, thee, to Ruth, Abel; and make thy amends."

"Hannah, does thee know if the book-seller has seen Ruth since the party?"

"I know not of my own observation, Abel, but Abbey brings gossip from the store, and he says they have been seen in company—"

"Where?"

"He did say, in Josh Darlington's buggy on First-day evening."

"Does thee mean to say Ruth went riding with that black-guard? It can't be—I can't—"

"Abel, study to be quiet. I know only what rumor brought me. It would sadden me much were it so; but if it is true we must try to strengthen Ruth in righteousness. To-morrow's First day. Thee will be at meeting and Ruth will be there. After meeting I will join Ruth and thee can overtake us on the road home. We must save her from this peril. Her parents know nothing of her doubtful ways. They are innocent folk and follow rather than lead her. Come, Abel, be of good

cheer, for it is thy mission and mine to do this thing for the friend we both love."

"But, Hannah—can I bow down—"

"Nay, nay—thee must lose thy pride; a soul is in jeopardy, the soul of our dearest friend. To-morrow we will struggle with Satan for it—"

Just then a long musical halloo came pealing down from the house, and 'Liza was beckoning on the sill. "Thee's wanted. Thy mother wants thee."

Hannah rose deliberately, and bid Abel good-bye. They parted at the white-washed wicket, Abel to his buggy and Hannah with-indoors.

CHAPTER VIII

You could see Hillslope Meeting House a half mile away as you drove up Sycamore Pike. It was nested in a cup of the hill, where clover and corn and meadow and orchard rolled downward in a verdurous sweep to the creek. You crossed an old stone bridge, climbed gently to the burying-ground wall, turned in under the trees, and there you were. The porch was paved with echoing free-stones on which even a decorous tiptoe betrayed the late comer; and the weathered hitching-sheds stretched away on both sides to the sod that held the seemly white slabs in simple rows.

The teams were arriving as fast as anything ever did in Sycamore, and the meeting was filling up. The old Friends, some of them bent low by age, were the first to go in; while there was an inclination in the smarter young men and some of the prettier girls to linger in the porch for a word in passing. Old Tobias Dove and his wife had entered with a dignity

that cast no glance athwart them; and Joshua Hackett led in his daughter, whose merry eye roved far afield. One by one in twos or little groups, they passed under the ancient portal and found seats in the rustling silence.

Deborah Bye got down from her carryall at the stepping-stone and led Hannah and 'Liza into the Meeting House. She trod with a ponderous step to the platform, called the gallery, where sat the rigid elders who led the meeting. Deborah's place was next to Josiah Vogdes, who offered no recognition as she took her seat, but continued to stare under his hat-brim with unseeing eye at the congregation before him. Deborah's face took on the same impersonal fixedness, which perhaps denoted a stage of action in the dawning of the inner light by which they were led.

Abbey went to the shed with the team and came in at the end door. He took a seat by Abel Howell, to whom he announced his presence in a long whisper with a good deal of suppressed giggling. Abel looked straight ahead and gave no sign of interest. He was manning himself for the scene to come, and he was not yet conscious whether Ruth was present or

not. He had noticed that she was not in her usual place with her mother and father, but he had not looked around,—he was too bashful and too much oppressed with his expected task to look around—for her.

The House grew very still. A song sparrow trilled outside in the poplar boughs and intensified the growing silence. Several people coughed, and a youngster asked a question of his mother in a loud whisper. It seemed a quiet age, and then voices were heard down the lane and presently footsteps echoed in the stone porch. Many heads turned on involuntary pivots.

At last Ruth and Jarrett came in side by side and took seats near the main door.

There was a great quick throbbing at Hannah Bye's heart and she lifted an emotional prayer for her friend, as she put her handkerchief to her eyes in almost a trance of religious ardor. Her duty was now plain. Ruth must be saved, and she was the chosen of the Lord to seek her salvation.

Abel Howell was so seated by the end door that without turning his head he saw Ruth and the book-vendor come in. There was nothing

in his impassive face to betray his feelings, but the restraints of Meeting hardly withheld him from violence. Abel was large of bone and wiry of frame, and would be a formidable antagonist in a hostile attack. But his strength was subdued by the non-resistant training of his race, by awkwardness in the face of an unaccustomed crisis, and by the moral pressure of the Meeting. He could have stopped Deborah's bull in its flight up the pike, but here was a situation which his strength could not handle. He kept his eyes on Jarrett as though he might, by staring, evolve some method of annihilating him which would come within the code of his people. Jarrett turned rather nervously as we all do when the eyes of another are fixed on us; but if he saw Abel at all he was unconcerned or unconscious of offence and he turned his face again to scan Deborah, of whom he had a sort of amused terror.

Deborah, too, had seen them come in and, in spite of her devotion, had noted how he held Ruth's parasol and helped her take off her light wrap. Not an action had escaped her vigilance. Was she not the Ark of the Coven-

ant of her Meeting? Was she not responsible to Heaven for the guidance into paths of virtue of that flock of tempted souls? Her heart hardened against the follies of youth and the vagrant fancies of her neighbors. The light that she awaited was beginning to glimmer thro' the darkness of sin and she felt the impulse to speak.

Her hands moved, her eyes became fixed and inward-seeing, and then she rose. She took off her gray Quaker bonnet and laid it, with care for the immaculate ribbons, on the bench behind her. Then, with head lifted and in a low, almost masculine voice, she began:

"One of you which eateth with me shall betray me."

Her tones rose and fell with the emotions she expressed, and after the first faltering sentences when she was feeling her way through her subject, she took on a sing-song formula full of Biblical phrases and almost like a chant. She dealt with her hearers as her flock who would incontinently stray, and who would surely meet damnation if it kept not the safe and beaten tracks that led to the sheep-fold. She used the illustrative language of the Scrip-

ture. Her theme was the betrayal of souls into darkness, and she grew fiery in her wrath against those who would tempt her lambs from the mother's side into the unknown wilderness of sin.

The simple folk whom she addressed were wont to hear such discourses without being moved very much by their application. Sin and punishment were the subjects to be expected in Meeting, and each hearer thrust the personal equation from his own back to that of his neighbor. But, coming so pointedly on the entrance of Ruth and Jarrett, Deborah's discourse stirred the torpid imagination of even such inveterate hearers who caught, in a dim sort of way, the train of cause and effect. The feeling flew through the house, and before long it became a conviction that Ruth was in danger.

There was more speaking. A young girl in a pretty summer frock suddenly rose, turned round, and kneeled on the floor with her head on the seat. She poured forth an eloquent and innocent prayer to the Father of Nature and spoke—rather chanted—an improvised poem

that caught in its fabric the songs of birds to whose accompaniment it was uttered, and the hymn of the heart that gave it voice.

A long silence followed. 'Siah sat like a stone image, gray, grim, and stately. His tall hat of drab beaver never vibrated to a moving muscle. He rose like a massive bulk and stood long at gaze upon the congregation. His words came in sentences that fell like dropping water, not a variation, not an emotion. His gospel was fixed. It had no give. Sin was hateful. He identified sin. God had chosen him to bruise its head. Those who heeded not were damned, and the emphasis he used with this word made it plain how he relished the office of executioner. He sat down massively and continued to gaze with unwinking eyes.

But even in worship the human frame has its limits, and 'Siah had evidently reached his. He turned to Deborah and shook hands with her as a sign that the Meeting was concluded.

Everybody rose and talked in quiet tones and a rustling exodus through both open doors was begun. Out into the blessed sunlight, made green by ancient shade, the worshippers

filed in twos and threes. Many lingered in the stone-porch or stepped thence into their carriages that drew up in turn.

"Did thee notice Ruth Blake come in late with her new city beau?" said Bella Hackett to Hannah Bye. She held a hand to one side of her pretty mouth and her eye twinkled merrily. Hannah was bewildered. She had followed the crowd mechanically, and now stood on the grass with hardly an idea what course she should take.

She answered with eyes intent on the door—"Bella, thee must not; Ruth is—"

But the sentence remained unfinished, for there was Abel Howell. What was the matter with him? Abbey had him by the wrist and was struggling with him. Abel wanted to hurry round to the main door, and Abbey was trying to prevent him. What were they doing? What was it all about? Hannah was frightened. She pressed her hands to either cheek. She felt that something was going to happen. She did not realize how; but she dreaded it, whatever it was. She had a sense that Abel was going to be violent. What should she do, oh, what should she do! Her

heart was beating frightfully, and she did not know whether to go forward and restrain Abel as she had done once before, or to stay where she was and wait for Ruth to whom she must by destiny, and by leading of the light within, say some words of caution and counsel. She had caught Bella Hackett by the arm, who was now giggling with Lydia Paulding and Josh Darlington about Ruth, and so tight had become Hannah's grip that Bella turned to her with a wry face:

"Don't, Hannah; thee hurts. What ails thee? Thee acts like a constable arresting a thief."

Hannah gripped tighter and pulled Bella around to see what was happening at the Meeting House door. Josh and Lydia turned with them, and all four stood fixed in wonder.

Abel Howell had broken from Abbey and reached the main door under the porch, just as Jarrett, followed by Ruth, was approaching the step. There was a throng of slowly moving folk at the door and Abel was throwing his arms about and saying something in angry tones. Jarrett was looking at him in surprise, with no immediate attempt to defend himself,

but with a face that pictured his unsettled mind. He could not attack Ruth's friend; he could not engage in a scene at her Meeting; he gazed at his antagonist in a rather helpless way, which only embittered Abel the more. There was going to be an ugly encounter in another minute, that was certain.

Ruth was wedged in the crowd within doors, and next in front of her was Deborah Bye. As Abel reached out to catch hold of Jarrett, the crowd parted and Deborah stepped into the porch. The people—her people—whom she must protect—must guard and guide—fell away on each side and left Abel and Jarrett, with Deborah beside them, in a half circle at the door.

"Abel Howell, what would thee do?"—Deborah lifted her large hand palm outward, like an angered Prophet of old. "Does thee know where thee is? This is the house of God. Here are no evil passions, no hatred, no law of eye for eye—only God's law of love thy neighbor as thyself. Go!" And she pointed down the pathway to the pike. "Get thee to thy home before thee does those things thee will ever more repent." Her eye was fixed in

awful rebuke on Abel, and he quailed before her.

The little group of worshippers gave way, and Abel stepped backward, almost as if he were hypnotized by that piercing eye. He turned away at the edge of the porch and stood aimlessly on the gravel path.

Deborah turned to Ruth. She took her arm and held her in her great firm grip, while she looked up and down the full length of Jarrett with wide interrogating eyes, as if to say: "What brought you here among this peaceful flock of God's sheep? Get hence, Wolf, and betray us not."

Then she turned away from him in large and undisguised contempt, and led Ruth, in spite of herself, to the waiting carriage which Abbey had brought to the step. She did not pause for Hannah or 'Liza. The crisis demanded a quick remedy, and Deborah, with all her contempt of the world's politeness, was far from devoid of tact. The old white mare ambled away as fast as she ever went in her life, and the amazed congregation was too intent upon watching the team disappear to collect its scattered thoughts and utter its surprise.

Then there was a murmur of gossip and a shifting of drab-colored, high-hatted, scoop-bonneted knots, like the disturbance in a bird-house when a cat climbs too near the door. Matchem, the Toll-keeper, and Dove, the landlord, came together with 'Siah in a shocked and astonished group, around which collected a circle of the lesser men and several old ladies who hung on the words of the elder brethren for an explanation of this unclean thing that had befallen the Meeting. Bella Hackett was taking it joyously, with suppressed laughter, among her younger and more worldly friends, while the children, tired enough of the long, solemn service, rejoiced in an unaccustomed liberty.

Hannah had gone over and touched Abel on the arm. He started wildly, as if in fright, but seeing Hannah stand tranquilly, though wistfully, beside him, he recovered his senses and walked with her toward the gate. He was dazed. He said little, but seemed to be trying to recollect the quick shift of events. He began to speak in broken syllables; then stopped. Presently he was made calm by Hannah's demure presence and he said:

"He was going to steal her from me—a thief —a thief—"

Hannah laid her hand on his arm:

"Don't, Abel. Thee will feel better after a bit. Silence will heal thee. Thee and I will walk home the back way. Here's the by-path through Rainey's woods." They climbed into a meadow over a rail fence, and before the carriages began to raise the dust on the pike behind them they were following the foot-path under the shadows of the healing leaves.

CHAPTER IX

John Jarrett was too much of a sport to be discomfited by what had happened. He took it coolly, and looked around for somebody he knew. At the end of the line that was slowly pushing and buzzing toward the main door were Ruth's parents, who had sat on the front row. They had seen nothing of the encounter and were wondering what had hindered the crowd in the main aisle from more quickly reaching the porch. Now, they were at the step and Jarrett went over to them with outstretched hand. They were a worn-out old pair who had seen little of life beyond their own fence-rails, and who were led by Ruth's more positive spirit. They saw nothing objectionable in Ruth's city friend. He was polite to them and he meant to them a glimpse of that great world outside their farm which no doubt existed, but which was alluringly wicked if practically unnegotiable.

"Has thee seen Ruth?" said Mrs. Blake.

"Yes," said Jarrett. "I came to Meeting with her, but she went off just now with an old woman I don't know."

"I guess 'twas Hester Matlack," said her father. "They's somethin' they has to do about First-day School."

This satisfied the lustreless old pair, and Jarrett moved on down the lane. He walked with a firm gait back to Sycamore, hurrying as he neared the Railway Station and catching a train which was just about to start for the City.

Opposite the station where he landed, there was a café, to which he went with a certainty of tread which showed the conviction of habit.

"Hello, John," the barkeeper said through his drooping fish-tail mustache, rinsing the while some empty glasses and smiling a welcome.

"Anybody upstairs?" asked Jarrett.

"Drinker and Seedy and a lady or two. You'll need a bracer before you meet the ladies."

"City ladies not in it any more," said Jarrett with a wink. "There's a real nice little girl up country that's good enough for me—Is Drinker all right?"

"All right and tight," laughed the barkeeper. "So that's the game, is it? I wondered what'd become of you this week past. Don't do nothin' rash," he called after Jarrett as the book-vendor pulled the swinging door open and started up-stairs.

There was a long room with small tables and a verandah at the rear-end, over which hung some hop-vines and morning glories. Scattered about were several couples of men and women, smoking and taking summer beverages; and a waiter, whose evening dress had faded to a dirty purple, was calling an order down the tube.

Jarrett went out under the arbor, where he saw his friends. The two men and the two girls were playing pinochle and, so hard were they laughing that they did not even turn as Jarrett approached.

"That's my last game," said one of the girls, with bunches of hair falling out of her straw hat. "If I lose many more I shan't have a stitch to my back."

"What you playing?" said Jarrett.

They turned toward him, all talking at once. He made out that each lost game required the

loser to take off some article of apparel—earrings, combs, hats, and neckties lay in confusion on a chair beside them.

Jarrett knew the game well.

"Just right for a hot June Sunday," said he. "The more you dump, the better. Why not give up your hair and teeth, Mame?"

The girl with falling hair gave him a slap with her palm leaf fan.

He went over to a chair and lifted his legs on the railing. The outlook was across hot brick vistas and through back alleys, to the wide street beyond, now silent with the Sabbath hush. He sat there reflecting on the pictures of country beauty he had just left and casting up the difference. Wasn't human nature just about the same here and at Sycamore? Out there the Old Adam was whipped into subjection, but was always peeping around the corner and occasionally breaking away. Down here he was now and then chased to cover, but nobody was much afraid of him. After all, though, he was the same Old Adam.

The game went on and Jarrett joined in the laugh; but his mind was somehow not in his

laughter. It was up there at Sycamore, and he couldn't call it back.

"Hello, here's Lily," said the girl of wayward hair. "Come, Lil, take my place. I'll be reduced to a shift if I go on. Here, I'll get up." She offered her seat, but it was not accepted. Lily had seen Jarrett, and she went over and looked in his face with simulated surprise and anger. "Where'd *you* come from?" said she.

"Up country," he replied.

"Umph," said she—"when'd you get back?"

"Just now."

"Must be something-*up*—country," she laughed sarcastically.

"I been selling 'Heroes of the Bible,'" and he winked blithely. "I nearly sold a set to a mad bull down in Bye's meadow; but every time I showed him the red book he wanted it so hard I had to run away from him."

"That's a likely tale; but I hear there's a little hayseed girl—eh?"

"What bloke's been peaching?" said Jarrett gaily.

"Oh, you can't choke off the Rural Delivery. But what'll Becky Loveledge say, hey?"

"She knows her. That's all right. She's a peach, all right, and ain't I fond of peaches? Well, hello, Gene, where'd you light from? I ain't ogled you since you got out."

This was addressed to a spare, curly-headed, white-faced individual who loafed in, as though he was sleep-walking.

"Out? Out o' what? Out o' cash? You're about right—it's six months since I had any—and you been away. Say, where you been?"

"Oh, up country selling 'Heroes of the Bible.' Can't I trade you a copy, Gene? It'd give you moral tone, clean up your—"

"Look a here, Jar—you better use it on yourself. If it puts you in a eugenic condition it must be pretty powerful dope."

The pinochle players laughed and Lily said Gene had her ballot.

"But say," she said, addressing Jarrett, "did you know Becky is goin' up country this afternoon?"

"Who said so?"

"She told me herself."

"When'd you see her?"

"Jest now, at her room."

"She's there, is she? Well, so long, boys and girls, be good to yourselves." And Jarrett went quickly out.

He turned several corners and went down side streets to a little old thoroughfare of two-story houses with sloping roofs and dormer windows that looked out on the new day as if they had been left over from antiquity by mistake. There was a brass knocker where he stopped, and a sign in the window—"Furnished Rooms." He rapped twice. Miss Loveledge put her head out of the second-story window.

"What, is that you!"—she said severely. "Come on up. I want to speak to you."

The room up-stairs was furnished in rather dizzy taste, with pictures of actresses and opera-people on the walls and dark red hangings at the windows. A turkish divan was improvised out of a mattress in one corner, where bunches of pillows lay in crimson confusion. A stand in the center held cigarettes and cigars, a decanter and glasses.

Jarrett was rather subdued as he entered.

"I hear you're going up Sycamore way," said he.

"Who peached, that little joskin you been spooning? or—"

"Now look-a-here, Becky; you needn't get twisted about that. It helps to sell the 'Heroes,' that's all, and you haven't any kick coming—not a bit; you know me, and I been straight with you for more'n a year." He took a cigarette from the tray and began to smoke nervously.

Miss Loveledge looked at him with sublime scorn. Her face was handsome of feature and of color and her blonde hair was over-abundant. Her eyes gave forth a snap like a light electrical shock, as her sidelong glance pierced him through. But there was that in her countenance which is best characterized as common. She wasn't of a first-rate make, either in natural attributes or acquired manner.

For a long time she simply regarded him with curling lips and incredulous smile. Then she said with a lingering emphasis: "Rats."

He got up and tried to take hold of her, but she slid behind the table.

"Say, Becky," he pleaded, "don't you be believing these guys that try to give you a steer

about me. I'm the right stuff, and don't you forget it."

"Now, John Jarrett," she said, seated on the edge of the red divan, "don't you come any of your sweet peacefulness on me. I'm no Quaker; and I know what I want and where to get it. If you decide to chuck me, well and good; but I ain't going to turn the other cheek, and I *am* going to make things warm for you among the way-backs up there in the country. You can't—"

He went around to where she sat and stood beside her.

"Come, now, Becky," he said soothingly, "ain't we old friends?"

"I call a friend a gentleman who keeps company with one lady at a time."

"Have I ever done you dirt, now say?"

"What d'you call this, then?"

He sat beside her and would have kissed her on the neck, but she gave him a ringing slap on the cheek and got up. She was hot with anger and was not to be appeased by any flattery or caress. She looked at the clock. "It's now three, and I must take the 3.30."

"Where you goin'?" he asked.

"Never you mind," said she. "Come, now; I got to go." She held the door open until he went out then locked it and followed him down stairs. At the corner she stopped. Her large bunch of light blue feathers shook with excitement.

"I mean what I say! You got to go your way and I'll go mine." She turned up the street toward the station and left him standing in rather foolish surprise that for once he hadn't been able to flatter her into good humor.

"Well, if that wouldn't jar you!" he exclaimed to himself, as his eyes followed her receding blue figure down the street. "But I must make good right quick up there, or my name's Dennis, for sure."

CHAPTER X

At Sycamore Station Tom Darlington was waiting in his buggy. The train drew up and Miss Loveledge got out and looked this way and that to get her bearings. Oh, there he was, and she made a pleased bow and went over to greet him.

"I couldn't leave the mare; she's restless and afraid of trains," he said in explanation of his failure to escort her from the cars. "Get in, won't you?" and he threw back the summer lap-cover and made a place beside him. She stepped up with smiles of pleasure that quite eclipsed the storm clouds of half an hour back. Jarrett might have been enticed from his new affinity, if he had found a greeting comparable to this.

"Where shall we go?" said he, ready to give her all the enjoyment the clear beautiful June Sunday afternoon would hold.

Then her face hardened with some of the lower passions that Jarrett encountered.

"I want to tell you something," she said. "Drive on anywhere for a while."

He touched the sleek country mare with the springy whip and they started toward Sycamore Meeting at a trot.

He turned 'round to her for the message: "I hope it's good news."

"No, it is not; but it's just got to be told, and I must get it out of my system. It is that John Jarrett has been up here flirting with that little simpleton Ruth Blake ever since the party at your house. I can't understand what he sees in her. She's no style"—perhaps Miss Loveledge thought of her own superlative blue feathers. "She's no beauty—just a nice little country-girl fit to milk cows and make butter."

Tom Darlington laughed. "We've got 'em by the scores; can't tell one from another. You city ladies, now, are all different."

"Yes," said she, "and we know the world."

Tom looked in her face and winked. She smiled with an alluring show of knowledge and went on—

"Now, I always liked John Jarrett. He's good-looking and he *can* be nice. But lately

he's lost all his old spirit, and I can't stand him any longer. He's become just like all the other loafers that hang around McCann's Café, and they're a lot of crooked guys. What I want to say is that this stupid little Blake girl will come to harm if she lets him fool with her. You just see if I ain't right!"

Tom was delighted to have such a show of confidence from a city lady of so much style and beauty. It flattered him into thinking himself quite one of the knowing city crowd that he was used to meeting Friday nights when he went to town with his market wagon, or with a load of hay.

"Aw, she's nothing to him," he said. "He's only selling his book to her folks and friends. He ain't got any time for such spring veal as that."

"That's just where you're wrong," she exclaimed. "You don't know John Jarrett. You ain't a woman; you ain't had any experience. John Jarrett likes to pull just such a young and tender blossom as that—likes it more than he does——likes 'em better than he does me, for instance—"

"Oh, ha-ha-ha," laughed Tom.

"Well," said she, decidedly, "you just wait and see. Now," she added, "I'll tell you what I'd like to do. I'd like to go see that other little Quaker girl."

"Who, Hannah Bye?"

"Yes, that's her name, and tell her to warn her friend."

"Oh, that's easy," said Tom, "it's only half a mile over that way," and he pointed with his whip across the up and down ridges of the fields where the breeze was wading knee-deep in oats and barley. He was not so certain in the back of his mind that it would be feasible to bring Miss Loveledge and Hannah Bye together. He was a bit uneasy when he thought of Deborah. The scene at the Meeting that morning had not vanished from his vision. But this prevailing city lady was a prize he had much coveted, and she must not be denied anything he could give her. Besides, he could ill afford to show any fear or embarrassment. He was passing as one of the city crowd in a country village full of hay-seeds. He must act as her equal.

He turned the mare up a shady road called "Lover's Lane," which came out on the pike

not far from Byes' farm. The name gave him an opportunity for some rustic fooling.

"This is Lover's Lane," laughed he. "Ain't you afraid to trust yourself here without a chaperon*e*?" He pronounced the last "E" in what he supposed to be particular elegance.

"Lover's Lane, is it?" said she, with a little sidle toward him. "My, how dangerous it'd be on a moonlight night." Then she giggled.

"I guess I'd have to ask you to take the reins," said he. "Are you good at driving? Might try it now," and he made an offer to lay them in her lap while his arm then free took a curve behind her back.

She was not just in the mood for such gallantry, and she put the reins aside and he resumed his driving a little sheepishly. They could now see Byes' white-washed gate and presently they turned in under the arch of ivory buttonwoods.

"Hellooo—Tom!" rang out from a corner where the shade of the big leaves laid its comfort on the grass. "Where you goin'?"

"Hello, Abbey—come here," called Tom pulling up the mare and looking over his shoulder to trace the voice.

Abbey was both curious, and ready for his habitual exercise. He made a cart-wheel of himself, and in three long turns stood panting by the flanks of the mare.

"Say, Abbey, this is Miss Loveledge, from town—"

Miss Becky nodded condescendingly and smiled photographically. Abbey bowed low with the spirit of fun that was overflowing from within him, and apparently he would have signalized the acquaintanceship by a back handspring if Tom had not pressed the subject that somewhat troubled him.

"Miss Loveledge is acquainted with Hannah, you know. Met her at our party, you know. She wants to call on her, bein' out here for a drive, and"—he faltered—"is Hannah home?"

"Yes, but so's Deborah," said Abbey; and began to shiver and shake in mock terror.

Tom didn't like it much; but his reputation for being a sport was going to be tested by a city lady of striking fashion and he could not withdraw.

"Where's Hannah now?" asked he.

"I'll go see," said Abbey, bending down and slinking forward like a scout. He had a finger

across his lips and turned his eyes sideways, until the whites showed, at Miss Loveledge, denoting extreme danger.

After disappearing around the angle of the house and staying a long while, he gave a low whistle from the other side of the lane and motioned with both hands. Tom laughed a little nervously and Miss Loveledge asked him if this was a lunatic asylum. This made him laugh the more loudly; but Abbey had now crossed the white-washed fence and was turning the mare round toward the gate. He expressed the great need for secrecy by walking tiptoe and keeping one hand up in warning. When the team was turned and he had led the mare to the gate he went back to Tom and whispered:

"Deborah's asleep in her arm-chair on the back-porch. If she'd wake and find you here!" Then he feigned to have a fit. "Hannah, she was by her; but I motioned her off toward the orchard. There she goes—does thee see her white dress through the maples?—Now thee just go round to t'other side of the farm. Thee'll find a cart-road that leads into the orchard. See!" and he danced two or three jig

steps and spanked the mare on her flank. She gave a quick jerk and Abbey doubled up in a suppressed laugh.

"What a crazy little devil," said Miss Loveledge. "He looks like a wilted apple. Is he a boy or a man?"

Tom had no answer ready. His mind was bent on escaping Deborah and on fulfilling his gallant duties. He drove quietly over the clay road that skirted the farm at an angle to the pike and presently turned under the eaves of the orchard where the rails were down and the ruts of cart wheels were visible in the tall grass. Oh, how cool and sweet it was in there!

"Smells like apples," said Becky. "There she is—over there." And she pointed to the left, where Hannah was seated demurely in the low crotch of an aged apple tree.

Tom hitched the team to a bough by the ruts and they got out and walked over between the low apple-boughs to Hannah. Miss Loveledge was somewhat fluttered by Hannah's simple greeting and Tom tried to carry off the visit in a flow of talk, which showed his nervousness and did not accomplish his design.

"Thee sees she's (referring to Becky) out

here for a day's drive, and I'm sort a showing her the country; but she wants to see thee, and so I brought her over here first."

Hannah nodded assent but said nothing.

"Tell her what you said to me," he urged, turning to Miss Loveledge.

"Oh, I wasn't going to make anything of it, you know," said Becky, talking to Tom, but really addressing Hannah, "only I thought she ought to know."

"Yes," said Tom, "Hannah ought to know."

Hannah looked wistfully from one to the other.

"Well, you see, it's like this," said Miss Loveledge, "your friend Miss Blake's a little girl I like a whole lot, and I wouldn't have anything happen to her if I could help it."

Hannah interrupted—"Is Ruth in danger?" She showed no outward emotion, but her eyes and cheeks told her anxiety.

"No, not just yet, I hope," said Becky. "But if she keeps on letting John Jarrett fool with her I wouldn't give much for her reputation."

Hannah showed both fear for her friend and satisfaction that her inward feeling was thus

supported. She bowed her head in troubled thought. What should she do? There was no help, no help. The thought ran through her head of asking Tom to drive her over to Blakes' that same night; but she rejected the idea as swiftly as it came. How should she see Ruth? How could she get away? She was distracted within but as calm as the summer day in her wistfully sweet face and gentle figure. She felt that some response was expected, but her habit was silence and it was hard for her in a crisis like this to speak what she thought.

"Thee sees, Tom," she faltered, "that I am helpless. What would thee suggest?"

"Well, Hannah," said Tom, "I dunno. Just thee think about it and try to see Ruth right soon. Nobody can help her as well as thee."

Then Miss Loveledge, who was neither so bold nor so coarse as she looked, felt her rather over-used heart give a twinge of feminine sympathy.

"Listen, Miss Bye," said she, "don't you get worried. Nothing's going to happen to-day or to-morrow, nor a week from now. You'll find a way to see Miss Blake in a few days, and

when you do just tell her that a friend of hers says: Beware of John Jarrett. See?"

Hannah's fair cheeks held each a falling pearl from her eyes. She stood demurely silent, but felt in the pocket of her drab dress for her handkerchief.

"Thank thee," she half sobbed, wiping away the tender jewels and having no words more to say.

"Oh, Hannah, don't take it so hard," said Tom, soothingly—He winked to Miss Loveledge to return to the carriage. She took Hannah's hand and said "Good-bye." Hannah's lips expressed the unuttered words and Tom and Becky turned away to the buggy.

Hannah's sad eyes followed them far down the tree-edged road. She saw, without heeding, for her sweet and simple nature was troubled, and she did not know where to turn for counsel.

CHAPTER XI

Not love alone "finds out the way," but affection and the help of friends. Have you not seen a wide country hardly populated, with a farm here and there, severed by furrowed acres and disconnected rather than united by roads of dust in summer and of mud in winter? And yet peep into the frame school-house at the cross-roads some dark night of rain, or bitter night of frost: there with all the old whims and passions of ineradicable human life, are the boys and girls of a ten mile circuit as thick and friendly in the dance as though they were neighbors in a city square.

Thus was Hannah destined to see Ruth even though her distressed perceptions could not solve the seeming impossible problem. In her emergency she confided, as nearly always she did, in Abbey, and his deft mind with all its jerks and queerness had at its back a reasonable tact which a more serious being might often want.

As Hannah strolled, with head bent in anxious thought, back through the shadowing maples, Abbey pretended to stalk her like a wild beast, or in truth more like a playful youngster. She did not see him till he peeped from behind an old weathered apple trunk. Then he laughed in suppressed mirth, and poor Hannah could not deny him a wan smile.

"Abbey, be quiet," said she. "Give up thy antics for a while. I want to talk seriously to thee."

He feigned deep attention with folded hands and up-cast eyes.

"Come, now," she added. "I am in trouble, Abbey; I want thy help."

Then he was moved to attention and he showed his affection by giving her a little pat on the arm and leading her to a seat between the roots of a maple, that offered comfort.

She mused plaintively. "How shall I do it—"

"Do what, Hannah? Did Tom worry her? What did he say?"

"I must see Ruth, Abbey, right away; this very night. She is in danger and I must warn her. How shall I do it—?"

"In danger—why, how; how could she be in danger?"

"I will tell thee afterward, Abbey. I want thy assistance now. How can I see Ruth?"

"Thee can see Ruth if thee wants to, Hannah. I'll take thee to see Ruth."

"But how can I get away? Mother will not let me go this afternoon. I cannot be out at night. I never was out at night alone in my life. I cannot see the way clear, Abbey, and yet it must be done—the light will surely guide—but how?" She laid her head in her hands.

"Light fiddlesticks," said Abbey. "I'll be the light. Just thee go to bed early, a little earlier than thee does every night, and then when Deborah's asleep—about nine o'clock, thee steal down the back stairs to the door, and I'll be ready with the team."

Hannah was shocked. She half rose from the seat. This would be a disobedience—indeed a revolt. It could not be thought of. It hurt her to hear it suggested. No, there seemed to be no way. She gently swayed her head in despair.

"Now, thee's all wrong, Hannah," urged Abbey. "Thee knows Abbey can take thee

safely and nobody will ever know thee's been. It's dark to-night—no moon—and in an hour we can go and come."

Hannah gently swayed back and forth in her quandary. The light within was beginning to burn steadily if low. She still resisted; but the idea was not so repugnant. She had in a less degree than most Friends that sentiment of letting Fate choose for her; of slipping into a dilemma with the assurance that somebody would help her out. She was self-reliant, though frail as a flower; indeed she was like a bright hepatica that steals up into the bitterness of March with a courage firmer than the pine's against the storm. Her convictions came deliberately. At last she paused with eyes closed as if possessed of a resolution.

"Abbey," she said, "the way has been made plain. I will go with thee at nine o'clock. Ruth's soul is in danger. I must see her at any risk to my own."

Hannah rose and demurely walked by Abbey's side through the truck-patch of white-green cucumbers and gray-green cabbages, of festooned bean poles, and tomato plants crawling over their wooden racks, up the stone path-

way to the house. Deborah had in her lap an angular black book that would have held out little hope for dying sinners. She did not look up as Hannah and Abbey tiptoed near the porch. She was still asleep—but woe to any timid soul whose lips faltered with the supposition.

The sun sank down into the horizon of June verdure, and twilight hovered for an hour in the dewy branches. Then the stars dropped into the depths of the blue, and odorous night lay asleep on the land.

At nine precisely Abbey was at the door with the old mare. He had led her on the grass border where her hoofs and the iron tires made no sound. He held her bridle and waited, straining his eyes through the midsummer darkness. Hannah was there at last. The latch clicked, there was no key in that Arcadian neighborhood, and the door opened slowly—silently. She was frightened; but not deterred. Her heart was beating fast and her body trembled with the excitement. It was as if a summer gust had entered some island of peace and shaken its tranquil recesses. She quickly took her seat, looking up at the win-

dows with alarm. Abbey sprang up beside her. There were no antics now; he had a man's work to do, and he was going to do it.

When they drove up Blakes' lane it became increasingly difficult to know how to find Ruth. Abbey whispered that he knew the room she slept in, and that he could climb up the spout. Hannah was disturbed at this, and forbade him. Suppose they took him for a robber; how should she ever get home? It was clear that another way must be found. Abbey suggested throwing pebbles at Ruth's window, or whistling a tune she knew. But none of these ideas pleased Hannah. She was for getting out and quietly opening the door. Abbey was going to whisper that this seemed as likely to imply robbery as the other, when a big deep-voiced dog barked beside the wheels and, before they reached the porch a light was moved from the front window and came to the door.

There stood Ruth herself, holding an oil lamp above her head, to see who was driving up.

"Who is it?" she said in some alarm. "Abel, is that thee?"

"It's Hannah, Ruth. I must see thee. I'll get out at the steps."

Ruth set the light down on a chair and came to the carriage.

"Why, Hannah, what's the matter?" she asked. "Is thy mother sick, or—"

"No, Ruth," said Hannah as she stepped down. "I have a concern to bear to thee, and it must be told thee now; there is no time to lose, for thy soul is in jeopardy, and the Lord wills me to bear thee a warning."

"Why, what does thee mean, Hannah? I can't understand thee. I—in danger!"

"Ruth, thee has been meeting John Jarrett too often. He will harm thee unless thee is warned against him. Oh, take the advice of thy friend—be warned in time. Sin not against the covenants of thy soul."

"But, Hannah, thee must be crazy. Who has been telling thee these things?"

"Ruth, I had a visit to-day from the woman who was taken to the party at Darlingtons by John Jarrett. I think her name is Rebecca Loveledge. She has turned away from iniquity and has betrayed the designs of John

Jarrett. She is thy friend, and she asks me to save thee by giving thee timely warning against him."

"Bother the woman!" exclaimed Ruth. "What can she mean? I want thee to know, Hannah, that Mr. Jarrett is a gentleman. He means no harm, nor do I. I like his company and he likes mine, that's all. This Rebecca Loveledge is jealous, that's all; and if thee don't think better of me than what thee is saying, I'll begin to believe thee is too."

Ruth had grown warmer as she proceeded. The ground on which she was treading was not of the firmest, and as she recognized this her temper flashed a little even against Hannah, whom she dearly loved. She was conscious that the use of Mr. in speaking of Jarrett would not allay Hannah's anxiety. The accusation of jealousy against Hannah popped out in spite of her; perhaps because her heart was troubled and she resented any reflection on the man who was disturbing it.

"Oh, Ruth," said Hannah pathetically. "Thee's not thyself. How could I be jealous of thee? I love thee too much; and I pity thee

deeply. I want to help thee. I want thee to marry Abel and live thy life as thy neighbors do."

She reached out to take Ruth's hand; but Ruth was vexed and cross.

"I never heard of such a thing, Hannah! Abel has acted like a jealous husband instead of a friend. He hasn't been here since the party. He's sulking and wants me to coax him. Not a bit of it!"

Ruth, without really acknowledging it to herself, was drawing a herring across the trail; but Hannah was in earnest. She had a mission, and it must be fulfilled at any cost.

"But, Ruth," she said, "promise me thee will not see this man Jarrett again." She raised her voice now in her eagerness and Ruth restrained her.

"Hush! thee will wake Pappy and Mother." She listened a moment but there was no sound within; only a clock ticking. Then she went on in a loud whisper. "Hannah, thee's foolish. I am in no more danger than thee is. Get back in thy seat and go home. Deborah will find thee out and thee will suffer—"

"Ruth," exhorted Hannah with fanatical insistence, "I cannot go till thee promises to give up this dangerous company."

Ruth was growing angry. It was too much. She restrained herself as far as she could, but a final burst of indignation escaped her.

"Hannah Bye, thee must be either crazy or jealous, or somebody has tempted thee to do this. I shall listen to no more such stuff," and she picked up the lamp and went into the house and closed the door.

Hannah was struck dumb. She was in the service of the Lord, doing his bidding, and thus was His message ignored. Her experience was too limited to realize that the offer of counsel, which would rescue or assuage, is one of the most bitterly resented of all virtuous services. The good conceive that they do not need it; the bad frankly like it as little as the devil in the opera does the Cross. Hannah was not made of the stern stuff of reformers. Her spirit of exhortation was soon followed by more gentle emotions. Tears filled her eyes. Her heart was hurt. She got into the seat beside Abbey with little hope in her breast

and with the conviction that Ruth, her friend from the sweet days of childhood, was lost.

The old mare ambled home to silence. Abbey had dropped his clownish mood. He had overheard enough to know that they had quarreled. He loved Hannah as a sister, and he felt her tears burning his own cheeks. He said nothing. The Quaker in him knew when to be silent. He patted her arm, and when they got to Deborah's door, he led her like a lover into the hall. She disappeared up the stairs and Abbey stood musing a minute with his chin between his thumb and finger. He was wiser than he knew, when he half said, half thought, that Ruth had tossed away friendship as a spendthrift his inheritance.

CHAPTER XII

It was about a week after the deplorable interview between Hannah and Ruth that the swinging oil lamp in Hackett's general store at Sycamore shed its yellow dimness on a group of townsmen who had come in for Saturday night's supplies both in provisions and in gossip.

They were principally men; but a sun-bonneted woman or two from nearby houses had also run across the turnpike for the last forgotten article of diet to be used in Sunday's solemn midday dinner. Somehow or other the men all had a dingy brown hue no matter what color their covering had originally shown. The weather and the earth had got into their hats of straw or felt; and the trousers that disappeared into boots or shrivelled up at ankles, were stained to match the furroughs they had followed. There was little variety in the fashion of coats or shirts because most of them had come out of that identical store

and had belonged to the same original species. The checked aprons and checked sun-bonnets of the women gave almost the effect of a uniform.

But if externals were thus little varied, internals were as distinct as the number present, who were either lounging on the counter, or sitting in a sort of pipe-smoking séance under the circle of the yellow lamp. The odor of spices long held in cans of lacquered tin and of sugar and oils and dried peaches and apples, and candy that looked like carven stones, and cigars and sweet chewing tobacco cut in slabs, and cheeses and over-dry gum boots and the aforesaid ready-made clothing—a mingled fragrance of shut-up groceries and other wants of man, seemed to linger just inside the door and greet you genially as you entered.

Friend Hackett and Bella Hackett and a hired man were as busy as anything ever got to be at Sycamore, behind the counter, or among the clothes, or deep in barrels of dried corn or beans or prunes, or potatoes—for it is an amazing law of the economy of the farmer that he generally has to buy for his own subsistence the article he is constantly selling to

support life in others—and there was a murmur of talk and vacant laughter from the idlers.

"D' you hear about Deborah's bull?" said a weather dried farmer called Samuel Dotterer, addressing the hired man.

The hired man named Dock, because perhaps his thick greasy black hair was treated in that fashion supposed to be a city cut, at about the point where it met his shirt-collar, was at this moment doubled up and bending into a half-empty flour barrel. You could hear his snicker made hollow by the depths of the barrel, and he pulled himself out, laughing with a touch of that complaisance which a good salesman always owes to a customer.

"Yas, wasn't that the limit?" He had city connections and was not a little proud of his citified language. "He sure did make a hole in that there chicken yard." Then he doubled over and laughed.

"What's he grinnin' at?" said old deaf Dr. Paulding, who stood by the cigar-case puffing a pipe.

"Oh, it's about Deborah Bye's bull," said Bella shouting in his ear. "The bull ran out

Lover's Lane and into 'Siah's hen-yard. He tore up the ground and put his head through the glass frame and couldn't get it out again. 'Siah in his drab beaver hat and shad-belly coat was walking home from Fifth-day Meeting like this," and Bella lifted her frock and imitated his stately tread. "He paced into the chicken-yard and shut the gate after him. Then he gave the bull a whack with his cane. Mr. Bull pulled down the shed and with the glass sash around his neck made for 'Siah. 'Siah stepped, like he was going to preach, behind the old mill stone used for a trough in the middle of the yard. Mr. Bull didn't like his text, so he went after him, and they ran round and round the trough. You might a-thought Deborah was after him 'stead of the bull. Then Letty the black cook came out and opened the gate for her mussed-up master." There was general good cheer at this, for everything waited while Bella told it, and Dock gave his leg a whack of high satisfaction.

"Say, does thee know this feller Jarrett that Deborah turned out 'n Meeting Sunday?" said Bill Booth to Hackett.

"Know him! I'd know his hide if I saw it

in a tanyard. He's a sport, by ginger, a real sport!"

"What's he up to, anyhow?" said Dan Dotterer. "He ain't goin' to keep company with Ruth, no how, is he? He's a regler city swell—"

Dock interrupted with a snatch of a facetious city ballad—

"Don't play billiards with my little brother's crutch," he hummed, and winked at Jane Bean, who was selecting onions at a tray beside him.

"Oh, you git out with your sinful songs," said Mrs. Jane, a rather mature lady with a tendency to playfulness.

"No, but I ain't sayin' nothing; can't you enjoy music without tryin' to find out what it's about?" She aimed a slap at his apron.

There was a step on the dark porch outside and another customer appeared. He had on his Sunday clothes and broad brimmed straw hat. Everybody turned to the door, and he stood hesitating in the uncertain light.

"Why, it's Benny Blake," sang out a voice, and they greeted him with "How do, Benjamin," and turned to their talk and other business.

He still stood in the doorway between the brooms and the long-handled hoes and pitch forks. He said nothing. He seemed to be preparing to speak, but unable to begin. His hands seemed stiff and useless, held a little before him in appealing helplessness.

"Friends, has any of you—" He was speaking, but nobody heard. They went on talking and left him unnoticed.

Again he tried—"Have any of you seen anything—"

He got no further. Then he came a step forward and took Dr. Paulding by the sleeve. "Has thee seen—"

Dr. Paulding leaned down with his hand at his ear. This made Benny Blake shout in a thin, frightened voice, and all were listening—

"Has any Friend seen anything of my girl, Ruth?"

Each turned toward the other, and then they all looked at Benny. Seen anything of Ruth? Why, they had just been talking about her. Nothing could happen to Ruth. She was a child of the country side. Her old father must be doddering. He never was very bright.

But Ruth was bright enough to take care of herself.

This was passing in its several forms through the minds, more or less capable of reasoning, that heard Benny's problem. Then up spoke the proprietor, as having authority there.

"Why, Benjamin, I ain't seen thy Ruth since last First-Day when Deborah took her off home in her team. Has thee asked at Deborah's?"

Benny Blake seemed too much stunned to have any idea beyond questioning his neighbors there assembled. He said nothing, but his poor old face was fixed in a hopeless stare.

"Bella, has thee seen anything of Ruth since First-Day?" asked her father.

Bella nodded many times, with a furtive eye on Benny.

"Where did thee see her?"

Bella put a finger across her lips and motioned her hand at Benny, as if to say—Look at him. He's crazy. I can't tell while he is listening! But her father insisted.

"Tell us what thee knows."

In a low voice Bella answered. "I saw her milking in Blakes' farm-yard on Third-Day evening."

This woke Benny up. He had hoped for news, and his feeble reasoning powers were for the moment stimulated.

"Ruth was with us till last milking-time. We have not seen her since. She disappeared last night without a word to Mother or me. Has any Friend seen her? Has thee seen her, Friend Paulding, or thee Friend Dotterer, or thee, or thee, or thee?" and he pointed with a stiff and half raised hand as he asked, while his wrinkled and weather-browned face was full of indescribable pain.

"Well, no!" said one. "I ain't seen nothing of Ruth since First-Day—quite like Dan'l. But my Annie, she was talkin' to her the first of the week."

"Aw, he said she's at the farm till last night," put in Dock. "Now, I seen a trace of her, but I ain't sure I'm right. A red auto went past here last even', and I thought to myself at the time—a little red automobile carrying that book-agent in it ain't often on these

here roads. I wonder where he's goin'. But he wasn't travellin' towards Blakes, so mebby I'm wrong."

"Oh, come, Benny," said Dr. Paulding, shouting in his ear as though he were deaf. "Thee needn't have any worry. Ruth'll be all right. I guess she's up to Deborah's now."

By this time Jane Bean, both curious, and touched at heart, had gone over to Benny and taken his hand to try to lead him to a seat. But Dr. Paulding now proposed that he should take the feeble old man to Deborah Bye's, where he was convinced he would find Ruth safe and sound. He shouted at Benny again.

"Thee come with me to Deborah's. We'll find Ruth in no time." And he took the arm of Benjamin, who was easily led, and started toward his own carriage, which was hitched at the rail. Everybody followed through the door, and when Dr. Paulding had put Benjamin in and had driven off, every one who had a wagon did the same. Bella and her father were left alone in the store, while the patrons who had come on foot were in a tight knot of gossip outside in the porch, including Dock who was as active as a city detective in

inventing theories which would never fit into any known fact.

Thus a half dozen teams drove up Byes' lane in the darkness of that summer Saturday night.

Such a thing had never been known in the memory of the oldest man there—saving, of course, when the Bye family had a funeral, which was seldom enough, and that was in the day time. A wedding had long been out of the question, unless Hannah should marry, and a party?—Well, parties, except the taking of cake and coffee in solemn formality, were a weakness of the flesh and a temptation of the devil.

The leading carriage was Dr. Paulding's, in which poor old Benny Blake sat in semi-unconsciousness of what was happening to him. He followed where the Doctor led. The little remnant of logical mind left him by his misfortune was devoted to repeating now and then in monotonous tones—"Has anybody seen my girl, Ruth?"

At the door below the three windows the Doctor got out and lifted the knocker that had not so long ago sounded the first summons from Jarrett. This time it demanded quick

attention. Its voice had changed from deferent appeal to insistent command. There was a pause, and the knocking was repeated. Then a candle sent a slender thread of light through the middle window above and the curtain was raised and the head of Deborah appeared. She lifted the sash and in an irritated voice demanded:

"Who is it? What do you want?"

Dr. Paulding, with his hand curved behind his deaf ear told who it was, and then asked if they had Ruth Blake staying there.

"Staying here? No," shouted Deborah. "Why, is she not at her home?" There was a stern want of sympathy in her voice, and incredulity was not far behind it.

Dr. Paulding explained all he knew; and by that time Hannah's head was seen behind her mother's at the window, and Abbey and 'Liza were peeping from the dormer windows in the roof.

Deborah was not convinced; but she was moved to ask further questions. Dr. Paulding said that Benjamin Blake was in his carriage, and she addressed the unseen Benny severely.

"Benjamin, have thy wife and thee no better control of thy child than to let her wander from thy farm into dissolute company?"

Poor Benny made no answer. He knew as little where he was at that moment as who was addressing him. No answer coming, Deborah would have uttered a moral lecture, but Dr. Paulding requested her to ask Hannah and Abbey and 'Liza if they had seen Ruth since last evening. Deborah could not evade this duty; but she felt that her own sanctity was invaded by sin thus to question her allotted lambs about a subject so worldly.

Hannah through her handkerchief answered no. She had been sobbing quietly. Now she broke away from Deborah, and came down to the front door, which she opened. She stood there in her night wrapper like a Niobe of the countryside, while Deborah's heavy tread sounded on the oil-clothed stairs behind her. Abbey had got on some clothes and appeared around the corner of the house, with 'Liza partly clad peeping over his shoulder.

Hannah asked where Benjamin Blake was. They showed her. Then she stepped into the carriage beside him and took his hand. The

rest were stilled. Even Deborah, astounded as she was at Hannah's unseemly conduct and unpresentable dress, could find no syllable to forbid so humane an impulse. Benny hardly realized at first who was beside him. But as Hannah pressed his hand and asked him sweetly where he had last seen Ruth, he seemed to know that it was Ruth's dearest friend who was with him, and he wept weak tears while trying to tell what he knew.

"Thee sees, she would do her milking about five o'clock. Then she would come in and set the table for supper. Well, she did this and she ate her supper with Mother and me, and then we went to set out on the porch and left her and the hired girl to clear up the table. She didn't come out to the porch, but went to her room and we didn't see her again. When we went up to bed about nine o'clock she was not in her room. Mother was scared at this, but I wasn't. Ruth often went out to see friends, but she always told us she was going. This time she'd forgot it, that was all. So we went to bed and to sleep. She didn't come back in the morning, so Mother was always at the gate looking down the lane for her. But

when night came and Ruth didn't come I was scared, too, so I hitched up and went down to Sycamore. Does thee know where she is, Hannah? Thee'll find her for us, won't thee?"

Hannah soothed him quietly; but it was so clear to her that Ruth had fallen into the jaws of the insatiable tempter that she could hardly speak. "Thy friends will take care of thee," she half sobbed, "and—and find her for thee, surely. Now thee must go home. Maybe Ruth is there while thee is away."

This sent his poor wits wondering if Ruth had got home, and he feebly called for Dr. Paulding to take him back. Not a minute could he wait. Ruth was at home, and he must see her instantly. Dr. Paulding had been questioning Abbey and 'Liza, who knew nothing about Ruth. He heard Benny's high-pitched voice and came directly to the carriage. He helped Hannah out and got in himself. As he took the reins Hannah implored him to ask at the railroad station and at the drug store. She begged him to find her,—to find her before it was too late.—She was moved almost to frenzy; but her gentle spirit showed only the outward sign of tears.

But Deborah took Hannah firmly by the arm and reached for the door. She was weary of this tumult at her peaceful and seemly threshold in the night, and she was shocked at Hannah's behavior. Why were not her neighbors as watchful of their children's welfare as herself? Such evils could not happen if parents were righteous and children were ready to obey. Was not this a mischievous example for all her dutiful household?

As the teams turned in the dark lane, Deborah shut the door, not too gently, and the old house looked as prim and undisturbed as it had just now when sleep lay upon it before the procession of carriages drove up the lane. Nobody had alighted from any of the teams, though heads had discreetly leaned from every one. The curiosity mingled with sympathy had been overflowing. But few in that village of conventional Friends cared to tempt the indignation of Deborah Bye. She was a leader in the faith; but the faith was a stern one, and reproof was like a lash when administered by Deborah.

CHAPTER XIII

Dr. Paulding drove Benny back to the store, and all the rest followed. Benny's team was still hitched at the rail in front of the store. By the time the straggling carriages and buggies began to arrive a rather excited crowd had gathered in the porch, which was augmented now by the people in the teams. Dock was holding forth in the centre of the group.

He'd bet, he said, they'd make for the city, and if they had he'd bet you a dollar to a doughnut he'd find 'em in no time. Just you give him one clue and tell him where they were seen to go and he'd catch 'em as slick as grease.

"But," said Dan Dotterer, "how does he know they're together? He had no evidence that Ruth ran away with the book-peddler."

"Didn't I see him yesterday evening in a small red automobile passing this here store? Right there it was; right there in the pike."

"Oh, give us a rest," said a voice from the crowd, and Dock went on gesticulating and

producing volumes of hot air to the few who would listen.

For now drove up Abel Howell and everybody turned to him. He was as unconscious of the event which would pierce his heart and change the current of his being as the ox that walks stolidly into the slaughter pen. There were plenty of kind friends present who were eager to wield the stroke; but he saw Benjamin led from Dr. Paulding's carriage to Blake's old team and he went over to help him. Jane Bean twitched his sleeve and he turned.

"Thee'd better not disturb Benjamin just now," she said, rather luxuriating in the knowledge she was going to impart.

"Why?" said Abel, growing scared.

"Well, somethin's happened."

"To Benny Blake?" he asked with eyes fixed on her.

"N-no!" said she, "not to Benny."

"To Ruth!"

"Well, yes; to Ruth."

He caught her by the arm as if he would shake the truth out of her. She was a bit frightened; but she continued as though the morsel were rich enough to warrant any risk,

"Thee knows she's run away with that book-peddler, don't thee?"

"My God"—cried Abel. He let go of Jane's arm and ran up to the carriage where Benjamin now sat. He caught the old man by the sleeve to draw his attention and he begged like one praying to God on high to know what had happened. Benny looked vacantly at him without knowing who it was. But gradually, as Abel implored him to say the truth the poor old man realized that it was Abel, who was once to have been his son-in-law. He put out his hand and Abel clasped it in his great grip. Then Benny with tears and short breath and sometimes wandering away from the facts, got his story told, and Abel let his head fall on the old man's knee and sobbed. But not for long. The instinct for vengeance is just below the surface of us all. Abel rose up with tears in his eyes and lifted his strong arm high above his head. The group on the steps and in the porch that had been watching him held their breath to hear what he was saying.

"If ever I can find him, I'll spend every cent I've got to bring him to justice."

The crisis seemed to put a new kind of life

into Abel. He was temperamentally gentle, but when aroused by grief he had a sort of sub-intelligence that came uppermost, to remain active only while the excitement lasted. Then he would lapse into the routine of his country life, and his unstimulated self would lead him to acquiescence in his fate, whatever it might be.

Just now he was inspired to instant action. He demanded to know who had any clue. Dock came to the edge of the stairs, and with conscious importance told of the small red auto he had seen pass the store going the wrong way. But this was hardly a lead that any one could then follow. Dr. Paulding bethought him of Hannah Bye's concern, and he suggested going to the drug store and the railway station.

In the tension of the moment this was hailed as a certain method of tracing Ruth. Dr. Paulding said he would drive Benjamin home, and then the rest started down the road, led by Abel Howell, for the railway station.

Hardly ever in its history had the station seen such a crowd in its waiting-room at that time of night. Abel called the ticket agent out

from behind his screen, and they had a talk, surrounded by, and interrupted by, nearly all Sycamore that was not in bed at ten P. M. But the station agent was quite sure that Ruth alone, or Ruth accompanied by anybody else, had not taken a train since afternoon before last on the cars leaving that station, up or down. This was a disappointment; but there was still the drug store.

The druggist was busy with his Saturday night's last calls, and he could not get over to the station to see what was the matter. He had observed the crowd, but was held by the packages he never stopped tying with red and white string.

When Abel led the crowd across to his store and as much of it got inside as it could possibly hold, the druggist frankly gave up his business and became a curious and imaginative citizen like all the rest.

"Ruth Blake?" said he. "Why, no. I ain't seen Ruth Blake this two weeks back, but I did see that fellow that folks call her steady company, the one that sells books, go by here yesterday evening in a small red auto."

"Which way?" said the crowd in chorus.

"Why, I saw him going that way," which wasn't the way to Blakes. The crowd was restless and disgusted with the druggist, and began contemptuously to file out of his shop.

Abel was giving up. The spell of action was reaching its decline. If a clue had been found he would have been spurred to prolonged effort. Disappointment chilled him—brought despair. He followed the rest into the road. They trudged rather silently to Hackett's store. The lights were out there now, and not even Dock, "the hot air retort," as Bill Booth called him, was visible.

The crowd took its teams and one by one drove away. Abel silently got into his buggy and caught up the reins. Old Dotterer hailed him.

"Say, Abel," said he, "I think she'll come back in a day or two, no place like home, hey? Good-night."

Abel said, "So long," in a preoccupied and subconscious voice; and he too drove away with a heart aching, and no very clear ideas of his course in the future, but with a resolution in that inner being of his which would make it dangerous for Jarrett ever to cross his path.

CHAPTER XIV

The current of country life rippled on through Sycamore like Sandy Creek, which circled it in a wide bend, and rose and fell with the weather. There was a freshet of gossip and scandal for a month or more after Ruth's flight—for it was now an accepted fact that she had eloped with the book-peddler—and every new rumor, every city visitor or drummer at the Button Ball Tavern who had views on the subject, gave rise to wavelets of emotion, of hope, of disappointment, of spite, of humor, of despair. For Jarrett's plans had been well laid and no trace of him or of Ruth, with enough substance to grasp, had reached Sycamore since that fateful Saturday night. Jarrett was an American Arab. His business was carried on his back, and he could make some sort of a living anywhere. He was not dependent on a neighborhood. He was a Bedouin of the farms, and when he tired of one country-side, or town, or state, he could pitch

his tent in another. Or, as perhaps had oftener been the motive, when his acts became unpopular or punishable, he transferred them without any reform to speak of, to "pastures new."

For some weeks Abel Howell was every night at Hackett's store or at the hotel or station with an eager, hungry face, seeking news from chance travellers, with the notion that anybody from the City, or indeed from any place beyond Sycamore, must have seen Ruth, and could tell him, in his misery, where to find her. He hardly had enough initiative to go out to seek her—neither that nor means, for Abel could make ends meet only by applying himself steadily to his farm.

But, naturally, he received no clue in this way; and none had come to Ruth's desolate parents. They were old and feeble and indeed, never had had, at the best, that kind of mind which can take misfortune in both hands and bend it to a serene purpose, or overcome it with discovery. Instead of mastering it, it mastered them; and but for the kind ministrations of Hannah, and the ruder efforts of Abel, they might have perished from the blow.

Hannah was angelic in her help and her sympathy and she would have devoted herself without cessation—quite taken up her home with Benny and Mother Blake, if Deborah had allowed it. But that Daughter of Zion was inexorable in her judgments. She never relaxed in her belief that Ruth's parents were to blame for her lapse into iniquity. Her heart, no doubt, sometimes argued within herself for grace and compassion, but her righteousness broke down every plea.

Yet it was thus that Hannah's life found a new aim; and there was for her a saving grace in the care she bestowed on the parents of her one-time dearest friend. Without this preoccupation Hannah would have bowed to grief like a household plant that needs the healthy out door air. The atmosphere of suffering would have stolen her fragrance. As it was, there remained for her only one thought through all her daily tasks—How to redeem Ruth, how to redeem Ruth, how to redeem Ruth!

Ruth had disappeared in June. It was now early March, before the first blood-root, but not before an occasional carol of the song

Sparrow from an empty bough. The fields were dull and wet, and snow that had lost its innocence by contact with the soil lay in the furroughs and by the oozy roadsides. The moist fence rails steamed as the full southern sun played on them and the winter wheat made the heart leap up with a thrill of anticipation. The days were longer and full of vague and mystical promise; the nights were shorter, and sleep was made delicious by fanciful dreams of a coming ecstasy.

On one of these lengthening days when twilight was twinkling into night and the stars began to be golden in the blue-black of the sky, Hannah sat in the dining-room after supper and read from Penn's Maxims, as had been her habit and her pleasure to do from childhood. The one shaded lamp was small and of an old-time pattern, as if a penitential impulse had withheld its owner from over indulgence in light. It threw its yellow rays on Hannah's sweet, demure, almost wistful face, and served rather to deepen the shadows in the corners of the room than to illuminate it. There was not a sound to disturb the tranquil evening, indoors or out. It seemed almost peaceful, and

would have been actually so, but for the impending presence of Deborah, and for the pain in Hannah's tender bosom.

Deborah was away on a journey to another Meeting and would not be back till the night following. Abbey had gone down to Sycamore for supplies. 'Liza was within call, gossiping with a young cattle-driver from a neighboring farm who was attracted by her saucy opposition to him. There was no sound to make Hannah raise her head, but she had the sensation of feeling some one approaching her in the darkness. She lifted her eyes from the page and glanced at the door. It was nothing. Only her fancy. She read again.

'Liza had left the front door ajar when she went down the lane; but nobody ever thought of locking a door in Sycamore, and indeed Hannah felt the safer to have 'Liza in call. She read steadily; but again the sensation was upon her of an approaching presence. She looked up, and there, in the frame of the door, stood a man, faintly visible against the blackness of the hall.

Hannah had her mother's courage in a crisis. She did not scream or move. She

watched the figure for a moment, and then said, "Friend, what does thee want?"

He advanced, but she did not rise. She watched him narrowly; but showed none of the agitation she felt. He came closer to her until the light fell faintly in his face. Then she arose with tense emotion.

"You," she said, and her hands were at her temples and her eyes staring with the fire of hatred.

"Yes, Miss," said Jarrett. "I had to see you. Ruth sent me. Can we speak alone?" He looked furtively around.

"Ruth sent thee? Where is she? What is her message?"

"Can we talk safely here?"

"Yes."

"Ruth is ill, and asks you to come to her—"

"Where?"

"I will take you if you will go."

"Ruth is ill—perhaps dying, where is she? Thee cannot conceal it!"

"If you will go, I will take you."

"Go with thee!"

"Yes, why not?"

"Oh!" The thought was abominable. She

hated him; but her faith of friendliness and tolerance even unto the thief on the cross, was a restraint on her anger.

He saw that her heart was pleading against her will. He pressed his point.

"Ruth needs a friend's, a woman's care. She is in comfort, but among strangers. She cries for you when she realizes her fate and she begged me to come and ask you to help her."

Hannah held her head down in meditation. Her heart was beating furiously. The situation came to her in flashes of emotion. She was indignant, outraged, at the intrusion of this beast, this betrayer; but she felt the pleading of the far-away friend, the softness of human love; and the two impulses balanced up and down in her being while she stood in doubt. It seemed hours; but not even minutes had passed since he had appeared at the door. What should she say? What would her mother say?

He saw that his argument was working. He followed it up like the tempter he was:

"Of course Ruth is ill and indeed very ill, but it does not follow that she is going to die.

And yet, I think that if she could see you, Miss Bye, it would make her well, save her from danger—"

Hannah listened almost as though she were in a trance. He went on, but he told little of Ruth's condition or of the facts Hannah was most eager to know.

"Ruth loves you more than anybody in the world. She regrets leaving home and her father and mother; but it is you she longs for in her illness."

Hannah looked into his face. It was to her thinking full of guile. His handsome blue eyes did not meet her gaze and his countenance wore a smile of frankness which was not real. And yet she felt that what he said was probably true, Ruth did love her, and if she were sick and lonely it might be Hannah's duty, in spite of this messenger, to go to her. There was really not much time to decide. Abbey would be coming back soon, and 'Liza might come in at any minute.

"Where is Ruth, now?" she asked.

He parried the question. He said it was not far; two hours' ride in the train, but he

evaded and shifted and never told more than was needful to his purpose.

Hannah wanted to ask if he had married Ruth, but her heart failed her. What if he had not? She felt that she could endure no more than that. She hated to found all on this issue. She could not believe him so base as to come to her if Ruth were not his wife; but she could not bring her lips to ask the question. It might make a difference in her feeling for Ruth. She remained silent; still in agitated doubt what to do or say.

"I have an automobile back there in the orchard road. If Miss Bye will come to Ruth's rescue in her illness we could start right off and see her before midnight."

Hannah was made of the racial blood of the Quakers. She was slow to resolve, but when resolution overtook her she acted self-reliantly and instantly. She followed the inner light. That guide now said in the language of her conscience:

"Go."

And with the utmost contempt for Jarrett, an ungovernable abhorrence for him, she yet

spoke as though he had brought her a precious message which she would obey. She told him to wait outside on the back porch which looked toward the orchard road and she would go up stairs and prepare for the journey.

When she reached her own little room, looking out on the orchard, which she had used from babyhood, and seldom deserted since, she was possessed by new emotions against her disobedience to her mother. How could she reconcile her going with all that this sacred little room held and meant to her? She wept quietly, but at the same time packed her few needs for the journey in an old leather bag, took what little money she had in her bureau-drawer, and started to go down stairs. She had always felt awe rather than affection for her mother. There were no caresses between them and indeed such manifestations of affection were not a part of Deborah's creed. Yet she loved her child in her own austere way, and would have made any sacrifice to protect or advance her. Hannah knew this; but hers was a sweet and warm nature. She was full of tender memories of her babyhood and girlhood, and these, mingled with her mother's love

and care, flowed back upon her as she thought of leaving. She could not go without some sign of her daughterly duty. She went back to her room and opened an old writing case. She wrote in pencil.

"Dear Mother—I am going for a few days to take care of Ruth. She needs me and has sent for me. Thy loving daughter,

"HANNAH."

She laid this on the bureau in her mother's room at the front end of the entry. It was hard to leave the old home. She lingered to look back to her own door, but she heard voices in the lane, and knew she must hurry or not go at all. Through all her hesitation and dread of parting the impulse ran to go, and she knew she was going while she half resolved not to. She went down stairs to the back porch and found Jarrett waiting. He led the way through the truck-patch which Hannah and Abbey had followed before Ruth's flight, that June Sunday when Tom Darlington had brought Miss Loveledge into the orchard. Jarrett needlessly prolonged the journey in the dark by going too far toward the pike and thus

paralleling for some steps the lane in front of the house, where Hannah had just heard the voices, probably of 'Liza and her beau. As the fugitives got to the turn of the path beyond the corner of the house, they could faintly see 'Liza and the man who was with her coming up the lane. They were talking gaily. Hannah wondered if they saw her and Jarrett. She hoped not; but she was hurried on both by fear and Jarrett's urgency and she reached the automobile rather exhausted by such rough walking by night. She noticed it was a small red automobile to carry two and before she had time for further reflections, Jarrett had cranked it and they were flying away from Sycamore at thirty miles an hour.

An ordinary express journey of two hours on the railroad will take four or five hours by motor, and Jarrett was about right when he said she would see Ruth by midnight. They never stopped. There were no breaks, no accidents, and the night was fair and not too cool. They passed through small towns and over the rougher paving of some city streets. But each place they reached was not the place they sought and Hannah was growing more

and more alarmed by the distance from home and by the taciturnity of Jarrett, who now that he had got her safely in his machine, was no longer the persuasive messenger, but a grim and silent figure that meant to Hannah all that was odious in human life.

They were evidently approaching some large city, for the paved streets were now continuous and rows of stores and houses stretched everywhere, lighted by electric lamps and threaded by trolley tracks. It was late, but people were abroad in the streets with noise and activity and the theatres and moving picture shows were just emptying to augment the crowds. The little red auto went on and on, over bridges, through dark asphalted streets, up hills and down hills, all paved or shod with the iron of tracks. It never stopped. Jarrett knew his way and he was not going to tell Hannah where he was bound. She had never before been so far from home, hardly ever before in the streets of a city—never at night. It was dazzling to her, but dreadful. But she kept the frightened soul within her still by the whip of duty and the promise of salvation for Ruth.

At last they were coming out of the big City

on the other side and the smell of the country was in the air again. The roads were not so good as near home, and the machine went slower. She asked Jarrett how much farther it was to Ruth. He answered in two syllables as he had done before. "Not far."

But Hannah now asserted herself. She was not going on forever. She was very weary and frightened and she wanted to know where she was. She asked him, but he escaped an answer by saying, "It's about three miles ahead."

The roads were better, and the little motor made more speed. They were in a farm country again, such as Jarrett would naturally seek for the sale of his book. There was a railroad train puffing across the road half a mile ahead. They reached the bridge and crossed it and then turned abruptly to the right into a deserted carriage road that led beside a dark weather-bleached frame house that could hardly be made out in the mellow night. Here, by the door, they stopped. Jarrett got out and helped Hannah out. He lifted her bag and put it on the wooden door-step. Then he knocked on the door.

There was a dull empty echo within, but not a light was visible. He knocked with his fist again, and this time somebody moved inside and came ploddingly to the door. It was opened just a crack. Jarrett said:

"It's me, Mrs. Norny, let us in." Then the door was opened wide and Hannah could faintly see a very fat old woman in a chintz night wrapper who was cross at being waked. She murmured something about staying out till breakfast time and closed the door after Hannah and Jarrett, who went into the one front room of the house.

Jarrett told Hannah to wait where she was till he came back. He went creaking over the settling and unsteady floor to the rear of the house; and Hannah could hear him tip-toeing there as if he desired to conceal his presence.

It was a crazy, tottering kind of an old tenement of three box-like stories one on another, and every sound in it was audible all over it. Low voices came now from the kitchen through the shrunken floors and loose partitions and then, as if aroused by the noises—it startled Hannah like a sudden stab—a baby's petulant voice was heard over-head. Hannah's heart

almost stopped beating. Now she knew what ailed Ruth, and she was glad, almost recklessly glad, she had come. She could hardly restrain herself from mounting the stairs, but the prevailing caution of her race held her back, and in a few minutes Jarrett's foot was heard again. He came straight to Hannah and said in a low voice, "Mrs. Norny says Ruth is awake, but very sick. Will you go up quickly? She will see you now."

Hannah rose and went up at once. She could hear Jarrett softly shutting the front door and then the sound of his retreating automobile. He had apparently left for the night without seeing Ruth or telling her he was there.

In the one room above, lay Ruth in a wretched ancient bed—with her infant beside her. One candle on a wooden shelf lit the room, and there was little furniture beside. Hannah noticed nothing of this as she faltered at the door. She was agitated as she had seldom been before in all her life. There lay her dearest friend, a mother, and ill and lonely —perhaps deserted by a betrayer. How should she act; what should she say?

But all this was swept away in the emotion

of seeing Ruth recognize her. She stepped to the bedside, and they fell into each other's arms. They were weeping sorrowful tears, but the comfort of being together—the comfort for Ruth of having friendly hands to serve her, and of Hannah of discovering her even in this wretched and remote house was a recompense for suffering.

Hannah asked presently, in soothing kindness, how Ruth felt. She was alarmed at the reply. Ruth seemed exhausted, dazed, but clung to Hannah as to an only refuge. She could speak little; but held Hannah's hand in a grip of despair.

Thus they remained till the creeping light of a clear March morning began to make gray squares of the two opposite windows. Ruth had got to sleep then, and Hannah withdrew her hand and went silently around to where the baby also slept. She gave it a light feminine caress with her lips and then went down stairs, where there was a hair-cloth sofa, on which she could lie. She was quickly asleep, rather from exhaustion than a sense of needed rest, and the house was still till daylight.

Mrs. Norny began singing in a low voice at

some unknown hour. This woke Hannah who heard in her drowsiness the refrain—

"On me ear
On me ear
On me ear,"

but could not make out what it was that was on Mrs. Norny's ear. There was a smell of cooking and the rattle of dishes, and Hannah began to realize where she was, and the whole force of the hopeless situation returned on her like a resurging wave. She got up without much refreshment and quietly went to Ruth. Mother and baby were still asleep, so Hannah sat as though she were in Meeting, with an inward unquestioning prayer for the friend she loved.

When Ruth woke she had apparently forgotten that Hannah was with her, and the smile of joy that stole over her face when Hannah rose and kissed her was ineffable. She was weak and ill, but Hannah's arrival had done her good—and yet, as she talked feebly like her old self there was a passing cloud across her face and in her voice. She was emerging from her relief at the presence of her friend,

into consciousness of her plight. Her motherly instincts would have asked Hannah's admiration of the baby, but as she turned languidly to show it to her friend, the sense of her shame was deep upon her and she sank back on her pillow in despair.

Hannah dried her tears and kissed her gently and asked no questions, but Hannah's heart also sank to painful depths. She had been wondering why Jarrett had left the house and how he treated Ruth when he was there, and the query which had so much engrossed her on the journey—were they married? had haunted even her fitful sleep. But this sadly eloquent gesture of Ruth's had told the story to Hannah's intuitive senses. She felt a conviction that Jarrett had wronged Ruth and that he would desert her. There was no need to ask now;—the dreaded truth was plain. But Hannah's sweetness and tolerance for the frailties of her friend did not desert her, though her non-resistant nature went inwardly as far as it could go in wishing evil to the betrayer. She talked cheerfully of the future when Ruth would be about again, and took care not to refer to the baby, and she told some of the

events of home, but the tragic fact had made a chasm between them that even Hannah's tenderness could not altogether span.

It was time for breakfast, yet nothing was heard from the kitchen but noise and song. Ruth needed nourishment, and she asked Hannah to see what was keeping Mrs. Norny. Hannah went down stairs and following the strains which alluded sympathetically to Mrs. Norny's ear, found herself in a little square wooden box called the kitchen, which looked like a diminutive story of the house fallen accidentally in the rear. Here was the source of song.

Mrs. Norny was waddling about in an apparent hurry, without doing anything perceptible that would hasten her aims. She was half humming, half reciting the lines of a song about the strains of heavenly melody which she was to enjoy in realms beyond, and when she came to the period when they would fall on her ravished ear, she would bawl the refrain as Hannah had heard it in her sleep.

"On me ear
On me ear
On me ear."

Mrs. Norny turned in some irritation at Hannah's intrusion. In fact she resented Hannah's presence in the house, as hitherto she had been in supreme command. She looked at Hannah across her fat shoulder, as who should say—now what on earth brought *you* here? Hannah said sweetly—"Mrs. Norny, can I be of any help? I am used to housekeeping?"

"Help, did you say?" from Mrs. Norny. "And what help could you be to me? I'm all done."

The little range stuffed full of wood was smoking as though that was its particular business; the dishes and pans and spoons were lying where they had dropped; the floor was slippery with suds and the frying ham sent out a smell like a burning pork factory. Hannah did not question the statement. It carried its own denial. But her gentle plan was to help Ruth—and she paused for a way to reach Mrs. Norny on another side.

"Well, perhaps I could carry the coffee up, or an egg—"

"You just carry yourself up," growled Mrs. Norny, and took to singing to show how en-

tirely she ignored the existence of her visitor.

Hannah thought it best to go away; but the intrusion had its use, for Mrs. Norny almost tumbled over Hannah when she had reached the top of the box stair-case. She carried a waiter, and Hannah let her pass. She had grumbled all the way up about people being in people's way and being of no use nohow; but Ruth got her forlorn breakfast earlier—that was all.

Hannah could do little but sit quietly by Ruth's bedside and spread the comfort of her presence. This she did all that day and many following days, but with rising indignation that Ruth and her child were thus left without a doctor and, except for her, without friends or indeed any adequate attention. Mrs. Norny was worse than incompetent, she was really a danger both as a cook and as a care-taker, for she lavished most of her care on herself.

While Ruth had had her days of severe illness when Hannah first arrived, and the solicitous friend had hardly known how to care for her, she had steadily rallied, and there were now hours when they would talk tranquilly to-

gether of acquaintances and home and old times. But there was always that cloud across their once innocent affection. They could never grope through it to unity of hope and common impulse. The grim fact lay between them, and without dwelling on it or speaking of it, they would each be wondering in her different way how Ruth was to face the future. Ruth, too, became harder to please and a little petulant as time passed and she grew better and better in health. While she was entirely dependent on Hannah's goodness, she thought less of the contrast between them, but the gulf widened. Gentle truth and wayward self-will were far apart, and Hannah perceived that they could never again be as they once were.

Ruth never spoke of Jarrett. She was painfully conscious of his neglect, and that alone sufficed to close her lips. Even the poor consolation of his attachment to her was denied her as a solace and as a sign for Hannah. She could practice the racial taciturnity when there was a problem to meet which was not clear to her. Silence was safer and better than the shame of revealing her feelings.

Nor could Hannah bring herself to talk

about Jarrett. Her command of herself would, she felt, give way to hot words if she attempted to call his crime by its just name. It was a sin damnable enough to treat Ruth as he had, a sin that would send him to everlasting fire, unless he repented and craved the clemency of God; but this offence was now deeply aggravated by his neglect of her friend in her sore need. The act was abominable, unspeakable.

As the days and weeks passed Hannah's gentle tact made an unacknowledged impression on Mrs. Norny. The song, with little variation, continued at intervals. She was always more or less "on her ear." She could key the ditty to almost any emotion. If she was particularly pressed for time, which she had wasted in sleep or idleness, the tune would become a screech of offence. If Hannah had taken a quantity of work off her always greasy hands in so sweet a way as to make it appear that Mrs. Norny herself had done it, then the song became as soft as a madrigal. She would sometimes take great notice of the baby and purr over it when she was pleased, and if at these seasons she were allured by Hannah into

nursing it while the room upstairs was cleaned and aired, the notes would fall from her lips as soothingly as a lullaby.

Hannah would occasionally linger in the kitchen and gather such news as Mrs. Norny in her expanding friendliness would let drop. She was wondering why Jarrett called her from home only to leave her thus without aid in nursing Ruth back to health. Where was he? Indeed, she had only the vaguest idea where she was herself. There were no neighbors; the house was far from any others in the open reaches of a barren and hilly landscape, and even if a friendly impulse were to prompt some stranger to stop, the forbidding black, weather-beaten house, with curtains always down, and its deserted and over-grown door-yard, hardly showing a vestige of habitation, would have chilled his heart.

Mrs. Norny was Hannah's only possible source of enlightenment; but with Hannah's reticent Quaker ways it took long to discover anything that would help her. One day the butcher stopped as Hannah happened to be in the kitchen. He threw down a piece of meat on the table and said:

"The boss says youse ain't to have any more of them cuts youse has been gettin'—he can't afford 'em."

Mrs. Norny faced him with burning eyes.

"He wants us to starve, does he; and you're willing to watch us die? It's little enough we've had already. You go back and tell him Elita Norny refuses to expire—and will have him into court if he don't send us enough to eat, and you can say he knows what for. Get out!" and she raised a fat fist at the invisible boss.

The butcher whined that it wasn't his job to feed them beyond what was paid him, and he turned to go with a gesture of self-justification. Then Hannah had a flash of intelligence. She said:

"Wait, Friend; where could I find Mr. Jarrett now? I want to see him."

"Aw, you could see him any evenin' up to the Granary Hotel at Wheatland. He's stayin' there now, this month back."

"Thank thee," said Hannah, and the butcher went out with a sidelong glance at Mrs. Norny —perhaps expecting a missile. Hannah waited until Mrs. Norny had let her anger

escape in several fits of opprobrium and then quietly asked:

"Where is Wheatland, Mrs. Norny?"

"Oh, about six miles below here, on the Post Road." She pointed the way and indicated that anybody that didn't know Wheatland was born an idiot.

Hannah went up stairs and sat with Ruth for all the accustomed hours, but instead of trying to talk or to amuse her or to ease her melancholy as she did day after day, she was silent and preoccupied. She had an idea germinating which was becoming a fixed course of action, and when Hannah reached that stage in her mental processes, she was not long in following where the impulse led.

Next morning she dressed in her outdoor clothes, and after the usual duties for Ruth's comfort, she went to the kitchen and told Mrs. Norny she was going away for the day—perhaps several days. She had only the vaguest idea where Wheatland was, but she set out, on the deserted road that passed the house and by inquiry, and by watching the sign-posts she trudged the six or seven miles into that town of frame houses and stone fences about noon.

She had no difficulty in finding the Granary Hotel, midway up the one long steep main street, and then she asked at the desk for Jarrett.

The clerk winked at the telephone girl when Hannah said that she was looking for Mr. John Jarrett. He answered with official severity that Mr. Jarrett would not be back till night, then turned away to continue an interrupted conversation with the telephone operator, which was notice to Hannah that the incident was closed. Hannah stood demurely where she was until the conference was ended. This was an impertinence, to be sure, but the irritated clerk accommodated her with a further hearing:

Yes, he said, Mr. Jarrett was stopping there; would be back about dinner time. Dinner at 6.30. Lady could wait in Reading Room or come back, as she chose. How far was it to Sycamore, Pa.? He believed about one hundred miles, though he could not be positive without looking it up.

Hannah found the Reading Room and sat down for her long wait. She took lunch when it was ready, and walked to the end of the town

afterward. Then she came back and waited with such patience as only her sect knows how to use when some moral purpose inspires it. About half past six the train apparently came in, and there was a good deal of bustle at the desk. She had placed herself where she could see who arrived, and presently she saw Jarrett come in with another man. He asked for his key and his mail, and disappeared in the elevator. Hannah felt that the time had come for her mission to be fulfilled. She went to the desk and asked the clerk to send the card which she handed to him, to Mr. Jarrett in his room. She had written on the card:

"Hannah Bye desires to see thee in the Reading Room of this hotel, without delay."

She then sat down again in sight of the elevator to prevent Jarrett from escaping her if he attempted to do so. It was not long before he appeared hat in hand, and came directly, and without any apparent embarrassment, to the Reading Room. You might have thought him as innocent of deceit or wrong as a pious country minister, receiving a visit from a communicant of troubled soul. He reached out his hand to Hannah, but she offered no

answering grasp. He pretended not to notice this, but saluted her cheerfully and said he was glad to see her.

Hannah was gentle, as she always was, but firm in her conviction that he must be accused by her of his offences, and be warned to repent, and to marry Ruth as an atonement for his crime. Jarrett knew when he saw the card that Hannah was there to arraign him, and his device was the clever one of a rascal, of escaping from punishment by smilingly accepting it.

"Why," said he, "I'm delighted to find you here; I hope all's well up there?"

Hannah could not endure one straw more. She uttered what was in her.

"You are a scoundrel. I know you now. You have tempted and ruined a soul belonging to God. Unless you repent and repair your wrong you will sink to the everlasting fire of hell."

She said this with no excitement and without raising her voice. She was in earnest and the words would have burnt like acid in any sensitive mind. To Jarrett they were not agreeable; he winced inwardly at them, coming from so pure, so inspired a being; but he was long

past caring what the future held for him and, moreover, he could not go back, he was pressed forward by the weight of the acts behind him.

"Oh, come now, Miss Bye," said he, "you don't mean all that. You don't know the whole story. I'm not as bad as I look." He attempted thus to joke, relying on his handsome face and well-made figure. "You just wait till I'm through with this thing. Ruth and I'll get married and—"

Hannah was not alert for this lie; it deceived her.

"Thee will marry Ruth?"

"Of course, what do you take me for? Just wait till she's well enough."

Hannah grew cautious, but the weight on her heart was lightened, and she allowed herself to believe because it was so blessed to believe.

"But why not now?" she asked. "It would bring health to Ruth and happiness to her family. It would save thy soul from perdition."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jarrett. "That's good! My soul's all right. It's my legs that need saving. I can't get over the ground out here fast enough to make a living for three.

Ruth and the kid ought to have a nice home—don't you agree?"

Hannah was eyeing him keenly. She did not like his levity. His doings belied his tongue.

"Then I can tell Ruth thee'll wed her when she's on her feet again?" She was trying him; but he could lie, and she could not—not even act a deception reliably.

"Sure," he said with assumed candor, but his eye never looked straight in her face.

Hannah was driven to accept his declaration, though she had her doubts. If he promised thus freely, what more could she say?

"I hear Ruth is getting well, and the baby's fine," he said.

Hannah assented in silence.

"I ain't been up there much lately, because I've had to stick to business—you know why."

Hannah was troubled and watchful, but she had nothing more to say on that subject. She asked how far it was to Sycamore.

"Oh, about one hundred miles," he said. Then he felt he was on safer ground. He had needed Hannah when Ruth had asked for her—needed her sorely; but now she was an in-

convenient witness, and her insistence on marriage was somewhat alarming. It might, if too publicly expressed, become a scandal. He would rather Hannah were safely away. He could manage better now, the future that was uncertain enough between him and Ruth, if Hannah and her bigoted views about marriage were got rid of.

"You could take a train from here to-morrow morning and be in Sycamore by noon, or a little later—I suppose you are anxious to get back."

Hannah had not come to Wheatland with that aim, but if his promise meant anything, why shouldn't she go back? She had heard nothing from home for weeks. The sense of home came upon her like an enticement, and the experience with Ruth was, in retrospect, the bitter reverse. She was casting up the possibility in her mind; while the decision to get rid of her was growing in strength every minute in Jarrett's.

"You could go down for a while and come back again," he said persuasively. "By that time we could make our plans for the future—"

"And you would go to Ruth if I went back to-morrow?" said Hannah.

"Sure," said he.

This was another good reason for doing what was becoming a moving inclination.

"But, my bag," she said. "I brought nothing with me here—then, too, I didn't bid Ruth good-bye—"

"Oh, I'll express your bag—and your regrets"—he laughed—"give Ruth your good-bye. That'll be all right. She'll understand. You've been an angel to her.—She'll understand."

Hannah was wavering.

"Well, I'll think about it till morning," said she. "What time does the train leave?"

"Nine o'clock," said Jarrett. "I could get your ticket and put you aboard—In fact I—"

"Thank thee,—but I guess it's time for supper now, and I must engage a room." She would thus get rid of him, she thought.

"Oh! I know them here. I'll 'tend to that." And Hannah was in this wise made to accept his aid in spite of her repugnance.

When she came down to the dining room he was inescapable. He had a table prepared for

two, and escorted her there with such conspicuous politeness that she could find no way to retreat.

Again there was a wink between the clerk at the desk and the telephone operator. He jerked his thumb at the pair as they were led up the aisle of the dining-room by a colored waiter, and he uttered his views laconically:

"Another lady-bird entering the cage."

Hannah went to her room as soon as she could decently do so. She was rather bewildered by the way Jarrett had met her reproofs and had promised to go back and marry Ruth. She was too free from guile to realize that this was just what he intended, but she was not altogether deceived and after an hour of deep reflection she decided to exact a pledge from him in the morning. That was all she could do—she had no other power, no other hope.

Yes, there was one other way out. Of course, she could go back and stay with Ruth till he came, or follow him here again in case he failed to keep his pledge; but he was profoundly odious to her, and she loathed the task she had undertaken for Ruth's sake, dear as she was to her. If he really meant to return

and marry Ruth, if her expostulation had shamed him and made him repentant, as it would have done with an erring Friend of her own Meeting, why not put him to trial, let him work out the salvation which she had made clear to him?

She was beginning to long for her home, too, and though she would not have owned it; daily contact with Ruth's deepening plight was breaking her poor heart. There was somewhere in her mind when she told Mrs. Norny that she might be away several days, the inclination to run back to her home, even for only an interval—she could return to Ruth if it were necessary; indeed she might find another way to help Ruth among her own people. The emotion that arises from a coming conviction was impelling Hannah to act as she longed to act; and before she got into bed she had decided, with her gentle firmness, to deliver a threat and to exact a pledge from Jarrett in the morning. If possible she would also go back to her home.

Jarrett was waiting for her when she came down in the elevator. His attentions were warmly solicitous, he was exerting all his un-

deniable fascinations to captivate Hannah,—and to get rid of her. She was, in spite of her antipathy, allured into taking breakfast at the same table with him, and he officiously made it appear that they were great friends. There was no use trying to escape this. Hannah was not adroit at such shifts, and she gave in with the philosophic non-resistance of her race. But his devotion gave her the chance she sought of pledging him to his bounden duty to Ruth. At the table she found her opportunity, and thus began:

"Thee said last night thee would go back and marry Ruth if I went home."

"Why, yes," he said, just enough hesitant to imply a reservation.

"Well," continued Hannah, implacably, "will thee now pledge to me thy word of honor that if I leave for home this morning, thee will go back to Ruth to-morrow and bring her here for marriage as soon as she is able to move?"

"Well, now, Miss Bye," blustered Jarrett, "that's taking advantage of a fellow's—"

"No, but thee said it last night, and thee meant it then, or else thee prevaricated—"

"Yes, but"—began Jarrett anew.

Hannah then broke in with the most positive manner consistent with her habitual gentleness.

"Either I go back to Ruth, or thee does. If I go back, I shall some how, some way, find a means of exposing thee in this town. If I go home, thee must give me thy solemn pledge to bring Ruth here and marry her."

He saw that he must make a positive answer. She was in dead earnest. He wanted to be rid of her. She was getting dangerous. His only resource, indeed his usual one, was a lie.

"Well, if you think a pledge is necessary, Miss Bye, why, all right, I'll make it."

This did not satisfy Hannah. She said,

"Say the words, then."

With half a laugh, that had a surly edge to it, he said—

"Oh, all right, I pledge myself to go back to Ruth and to bring her here to Wheatland and marry her—is that all?"

Hannah had to be satisfied. She could do no more.

"Then," said she, calmly, "I shall go home by this train."

"There isn't any too much time," he said,

looking at his watch; and while Hannah paid her bill, he went for his own things and was ready on the threshold to show her the way to the station.

Hannah thought she was well rid of him when she boarded the train. It stopped only a minute, and she turned on the car platform in decency to bow good-bye; but to her amazement Jarrett got aboard. He followed her into the car and annoyed her much by sitting beside her. Perhaps she showed it a bit, for he said, "You see I am going two stations in your direction," and he pointed to the red-bound book on his knees. Hannah could not talk. She was indignant. But he rattled on about Sycamore as though nothing had made bitter to Hannah those memories of Ruth's flight.

At Shoemakertown he got out of the train, with a great show of leave-taking; and a load was lifted from Hannah's heart. He persisted in bowing to her from the platform, but she turned her eyes only enough to know that his odious face was there.

CHAPTER XV

About two weeks after Hannah left the somber house of Ruth's exile, there was another guest admitted by Mrs. Norny. It was a fine morning full of the intoxicating air of the dawning Spring. The roads were heavy with rains and there were few travellers afoot or in any sort of vehicle on the road that passed the house. Mrs. Norny was interrupted in her heavy labor, accompanied by song, which just now breathed of the soft influences of the springtime casting its sunshine ahead—was in fact startled by the noisy wheels of a carriage in the door-yard. She went to the window and pulled the curtain back to a crack. What on earth was this? Somebody was getting out —somebody was on the door step, and there! It was a knock of no uncertain summons. She had seen a lady emerge backward from the carriage and her sensations were a mélange of blonde hair and of hobble skirt so tight that its

occupant had to grope quite half way out of it to reach the ground. Mrs. Norny answered the knock in a spirit of readiness for any emergency.

The lady would like to see Miss Ruth Blake.

Mrs. Norny looked her over with both contempt and pity. "Didn't she know that Miss Blake was sick-a-bed?" The lady thought she was now up. Mrs. Norny sniffed, "She was up, yes; but she was not down." This was a clincher as well as a perfectly logical statement. The lady handed her card and requested firmly that it be taken up. Mrs. Norny took it with one end of her check apron and eyed it with some suspicion: "Is that your name, Miss Rebecca Loveledge?" asked she.

"Yes," said the lady; and she added that she was a friend of Miss Blake, and that Miss Blake would surely see her if the card were presented.

Mrs. Norny's suspicion was still alert, but she turned half away as if she were going up with the card yet lingered to look the visitor over again. Miss Loveledge opened her purse and took out a quarter. Thus crossed with a silver charm Mrs. Norny's body became ani-

mated. She creaked up stairs and down, and Miss Loveledge was to go up.

Ruth was seated by the window of the forlorn, bare room when Miss Loveledge entered. On the bed lay the baby asleep. There was little of comfort or convenience in the decayed furniture and the faded wall paper, now blackened with wood smoke, the bare floor and the guttered candle on the shelf. If Miss Loveledge thought at all about it, she was probably saying within her that Ruth had got just what she deserved; but her sweetened words belied her opinion.

"I was at Wheatland, Miss Blake, and I couldn't go back without seeing you and saying how sorry I am."

Ruth was not going to accept pity. She remembered Hannah's warning that night when Abbey and she drove over to Blakes' farm to bring the message of danger from this woman.

"Oh, that is kind," said Ruth. "I am very happy and comfortable, thank thee."

"But, a—" (Becky coughed into her handkerchief.) "But—I supposed you were ill," she said, "and that I could help you somehow, maybe."

"No, no," said Ruth self-reliantly, but smothering her rising tears. "I am very well now."

Miss Loveledge glanced at the baby.

"And your little one? Is it well?"

Ruth was not going to be cross-questioned by this young woman. She asserted her feminine resource of haughty politeness and indicated by half rising that the visit was over.

But, neither was Becky to be turned off before her errand was done. She saw how the land lay, so she came directly to the business which brought her.

"For your own good, Miss Blake, I came really to tell you what is going on. Do you know that John Jarrett has been growing intimate with your friend Hannah Bye?"

Ruth was agitated with twenty emotions at once. She could not utter a word. The tears rose in her throat and she was hurt nearly to death by this vital blow. She had been wondering day by day what had become of Hannah, why she went away, where she had gone, and if she would come back. She could not send for news; she would not write. There

was no resource but to sit there in lonely exile with her shame, and make up out of her suspicions an explanation of Hannah's course. She had dwelt on the chances of Hannah's entanglement with Jarrett. She knew his fascinations. He had deserted her for Hannah. This, then, was the last blow, the fatal end.

But if all these suspicions and agonies were passing in flashes of perception through Ruth's mind at once, she held her head erect, pressed back her tears, and exerted the character of the race she belonged to in concealing her confused emotions from this low woman. She merely moved her lips in a single word: "Indeed."

"Yes," said Becky, with all her venom let loose. "Did you know that he and she stayed all night at the Granary Hotel in Wheatland?"

Ruth trembled with the strain of self-repression.

"And that they took a train together out of Wheatland in the morning; and that he—"

It was too much. Ruth would have broken down if she had let it go on.

"Stop," she said. "I can't hear any more. You must leave me alone. Please, please go."

And she arose and stood so as to screen her baby as if from some creeping evil.

Becky was not easily affronted. She took the dismissal in good part and rose still talking.

"He's a bad lot—a crook without mercy. I feel sorry for you, and that's the reason I'm telling you these things." She was putting her chair back against the wall and turning toward the door. "Don't you ever have anything to do with him again."

Ruth could not speak. She bowed a good-bye and turned away, and Miss Loveledge was gone. Oh, how deep the poison had bitten! This was the last drop of gall. All the bitter hours were concentrated in this final accumulation of pain. Ruth fell on the bed beside her baby and wept into the pillow long and hopelessly.

CHAPTER XVI

Hannah Bye arrived at Sycamore Station about noon, as she had been told she would do. The familiar objects of a life time looked large and strange to her as she came out of the station and turned her head this way and that. She had not conceived the drug store to be so far away across the road, and the road itself —how long and unfamiliar, and yet how homelike it looked. Nobody had noticed her. She might have been a native of Wheatland rather than of Sycamore for all the recognition her birth-right brought her. She walked up the road, rapid both in step and thronging thought. She passed the Button Ball Hotel, with its usual knot of loungers and farmers in town for supplies (both liquid and solid) but no soul seemed interested enough to identify her.

Before long she was in sight of the white-washed fence of the farm, and her heart was beating with quick strokes of a pleasure that was full of apprehension. She had left in dis-

obedience; she was returning without repentance, spoken or written. How would she be received?

As she hurried up the lane between the great white boles of the buttonwoods now bare of leaves, she heard a shrill whistle and looked around to her right where the stone path led down to the spring-house. There was Abbey waving his arms madly and racing up the path to intercept her. He leaped the rail fence at a bound and before she knew it was in the lane at her side. He was almost bereft of words in his delight at seeing her.

"Is it really thee, Hannah? Oh, how good it is to see thee!" and he took her hand and held it to his heart in his intense joy at her return.

Hannah was touched, too. She greeted him as though he were a brother. "But, Abbey," she said, looking him keenly and lovingly over —"thee's bigger, isn't thee?—or, somehow changed?"

"No, I ain't changed a jot, Hannah, only from mourning thee; we thought thee to be lost. So thee's really back—really and truly back—" Then the cold fact overtook him, and

he looked with alarm at the three green shaded windows above the front door. There was no one there; but the visible dread of something threatening was upon him and he drew Hannah to the far side of a giant Buttonwood.

"Come behind here," he said—"She's been worse than ever since thee left. She hardly speaks, now; and her eyes bore holes in you. I'm afraid she'll be very bad if she sees thee—I wouldn't do it if I was thee."

Hannah was not free from such anticipations, but she had a purpose. After all it was her home, she meant to claim her rights as a daughter, to offer her affection and duty come what would.

"I have nothing to fear, Abbey," she said. "Mother may be angry, but she cannot disown me, and I must come back some time, mustn't I?"

"Yes," said Abbey in an alarmed whisper. "But thee knows how Deborah acts, Hannah. If thee can stand that and a good deal more added since thee's been absent—all right; but I wouldn't give Deborah a chance. I'd be afraid to get in her way."

"Thee's foolish, Abbey," said Hannah.

"Mother may be severe but she means no harm."

"Well, I don't want to be near when thee does it, that's all. I'll be near enough to be called in case thee needs me, Hannah, but I couldn't face Deborah when she sees thee. The team's hitched up to go to the store—there it is yonder, at the far post. I'll get in the wagon where Deborah can't see me while thee goes to the door."

Abbey hurried down the lane with little of his usual buoyancy, and mounted to the carriage. Hannah walked with a firm step up to the door below the three green-curtained windows. She turned the knob and stepped into the hall.

There was the old familiar staircase with its flowered carpet covered down the middle with glossy oil cloth; the narrow hall paved with its time and foot-worn oil cloth and the glass door at the other end opening on the porch and dropping squares of sunlight on the floor—the old familiar home of all Hannah's years, and her heart yearned to it and remembered its dear associations. There was the tick of the aged dining-room clock giving her a monotonous

welcome in a voice changeless through all her memories, and the orderly dishes on the dresser, the oil lamp with the yellow shade on the table, under whose light she sat that very night when Jarrett called her away—that fateful night; and then with a heavy step coming in from the kitchen to the dining-room—who was it?

Hannah looked with timid eyes, but the courage of innocence. She held her breath and her heart beat with love and with dread; with a wish to run to her mother's arms and be caressed and forgiven, but with a fear born of the restraint that was habitual, now so deepened by her sin of independence.

It was Deborah. She looked older, Hannah thought, and more massive and immovable. She was bringing in some clothes from the wash to put them in the press, and her face was unconsciously severe, though Hannah thought she detected, with a flash of affection, a trait which she did not remember before—a sadness, or rather a trace of suffering of which Deborah had never shown any sign. She had been so much the arbiter of the fate of others, at least in their spiritual experiences, that she

had seemed to live above the pangs of disappointment and of affliction which the weak and the worldly show in their countenances. The pathos of this, and the thronging emotions of home, gave Hannah an unwonted desire to act the tenderness she felt. She impulsively sprang to the door of the dining-room crying like a lost soul returned:

"Mother!"

Deborah was startled into attention, but not a muscle of her face relaxed. She looked searchingly at Hannah; then came forward to within arm-reach of her. There she stood, with fixed and piercing eyes, like a breathing image of stone. Her chin was lifted high, her hands rigidly held the washed clothes, and she was an embodiment of prejudiced and bigoted convention.

Hannah grew timid and wilted before her, she shrank backward and turned half away. Her impulse of love was chilled to fear.

"Oh, Mother," she said, half under her breath.

Not a word from Deborah. She stood like an injured deity that only postponed its vengeance to prolong the agony of its victim.

Hannah lost her courage. She thought of what Abbey had said, and she felt like running away. But she was not a moral coward. This was her mother, however terrifying, however cruel.

"Mother, I have disobeyed thee—forgive me," and she held out imploring arms that asked an embrace.

Then the wrath of Deborah broke:

"That child of mine should disobey me! That child of mine should seek out fallen women and dissolute men! No—thou art no child of mine! Thou art fallen from thy place and art an outcast. Thou hast chosen thy path and thou must tread it in loneliness and in repentance. Get thee away; I will none of thee here in this house of purity!"

Hannah sank to her knees. She had left home on an errand of mercy. The bitterness of false accusation was breaking her heart. She lifted her tearful eyes to her mother.

"Does thee think me wicked, whose breast nurtured me and whose hand guided me? If I have sinned it is thee also who has sinned, for I am flesh of thy flesh."

"I sin!"—cried Deborah in horror that the

word had been uttered. "I have lived close to the Lord, and I thank Him that He has lifted me out of evil. Thou wast seen to leave this place in the company of that tempter, whose red car had carried away the daughter of Benjamin Blake. And thou couldst also enter that car and desert thy home. No! I can no longer own thee."

Hannah's impulse was to tell the tragedy of Ruth in justification of her own undeniably suspicious conduct. She found herself exclaiming—

"Oh, Mother; Mother, if thy unyielding heart could know how I have suffered—if thy soul would soften at the tale of Ruth's—"

But she caught herself up on the brink of a revelation that would injure Ruth; and every sacrifice of self, even to the loss of home, even to revolt against the imperious rule of Deborah, must be made for Ruth's protection. Jarrett would marry Ruth and then all would be well again.

Deborah had listened with ears alert for Hannah's news. She was not above the human hunger for gossip. But when Hannah stopped, her mother showed by no change of

manner or countenance that she was eager for a confession. It was her racial instinct to betray no curiosity. She was in the act of driving Hannah from her home, unquestioned and untried. Her law was the personal one of the Jehovah of the Old Testament, awful and irrevocable, without inquiry and without appeal. She was the exponent of God's commands.

Hannah's sweet and receptive nature had imbibed this principle so deeply that she knew the iron of its judgment, she realized that nothing could change its decree. But there was coming to her support the native self-reliance which had carried her through recent bitter times. She rose with dignity and looked her mother in the face.

"Remember," she said slowly, "that thou alone art not the Judge of sin. There is One above us who rules the soul. Take heed lest thou do an unlawful act that shall bring upon thee His wrath—"

Deborah was startled and angered. She would have burst into passion, but for the restraint of her class. Her firm lips would not speak, action alone should show the depth to which she was stirred. She walked around

Hannah as though she were one cast out from the tribal sanctity. She unlatched the front door and held it open, with a finger pointed through it for the dismissal of her only child from home.

Hannah's spirit of defiance was deepened by this injustice. After all, her conscience was clear. She had committed no evil. Her mother was going too far, she was falsely accusing her. The precepts of her infancy and youth, at home and in Meeting, to take her soul as a guide, to be an individual in the service of God, had come to her rescue. She felt as though she were now promoted to be herself a person equal in judgment to her mother; and with this assertion of self rising within her she walked in simple dignity through the open door. She half turned as she stepped down to the stone pathway and looked with beseeching eyes of love into the implacable face of her mother. There was no return of sentiment or affection. Deborah was standing on her lofty pedestal of conscience, from whose narrow foothold love had been shoved aside. Hannah remembered in this moment of deep pain how her mother had driven Jarrett from that same

door not so many months ago, and she wondered if, to Deborah also, the recollection of that day cast any shadow in the darkness of this.

The door was closed. An era of Hannah's life was closed. She went down the dear familiar grass-grown lane as she had never trodden it before in all her infant toddling, her youthful play, her demure girlhood idling. She seemed to move in a trance. She could not credit that her home was no longer a refuge, no longer hers. In all the weary and hopeless days with Ruth she had been supported by fancying her return to this sweet, prim, lovable old home. Now it was no longer possible. She could not go back; she was in very fact an outcast like Ruth herself, but for no fault, no sin; she was made to atone for another's sin, another's weakness. And this was the lot of mankind, the common lot. She was no better, no worse than her kind. She would struggle on and bear all things that came to her, for in such renunciation of self she had been taught to seek the radiance of the inner light.

Strangely enough, there was mingled with these thronging and dogging thoughts but little

regret at leaving her mother. Filial love was planted deep in her heart and had had its expression in that deeply fervent look which gleamed from her eyes and breathed from her heart as she left the door. But this could survive the act of separation. She could love her mother from afar off. Indeed the burden of life had become so heavy under the inflexible conventions of Deborah, which imposed themselves upon all around her, that, in the midst of Hannah's tears, she could feel a sense of relief that the bondage had snapped and that her soul could henceforth grow in its own image, unimpeded by conditions imposed upon it, however well-meant, however good.

Hannah had no such consecutive thoughts as she walked with a rather hurried step down the lane to the carriage. She was not thinking, her mind was in intense agitation; but if she had been thinking logically such, no doubt, would have been her conclusions. The sense of all this was in her mind unformed, unexpressed.

She got into the carriage beside Abbey without saying a word. He patted her on the arm in token of his sympathy, but she responded

only with a whisper, looking straight before her with tear-wet eyes.

"Drive on—go anywhere."

He touched the old mare with the whip and they ambled down the lane and out to the pike and on to the store. He paused there, and again she said, "Go on," and he drove down the pike—on and on and on, till they were at the next station below Sycamore. She saw the station and stopped him.

"I'll get out here and take a train, Abbey," she said.

"Where's thee going, Hannah?" said Abbey plaintively and alarmed. "Thee's coming back, ain't thee? Not leaving forever—oh, not that—not—"

"Not leaving thee forever, I hope, Abbey, old friend." She was herself again now, calm and serene. "Thee and I have lived in happy comradeship—how many years, Abbey? Since thee came a little boy to the farm. And I don't think our friendship can be harmed by absence, can it?"

"But thee ain't going away again, is thee, Hannah?—No, no"—he wailed like a hurt child.

"I must live by my own hands now, Abbey." She would not accuse her mother. "I am going to the City to find work to do, to be useful, to put into practice the lessons of the Meeting."

"But, Hannah," he wailed—

"Yes, to try to put to use what we all talk of but so seldom do—" There was now a sort of inspired look in her face. She had found herself, and when Hannah had taken a stand on faith, or on her duty she was almost clothed with wings in her resolution to fly to its accomplishment.

"Then thee is going to leave the farm. Thee is. And I am going with thee. I couldn't stay—"

"Abbey, thee's crazy. What would mother do without thee?"

"I'd do well enough without her."

"Hush-h-h," warned Hannah. "Thee mustn't, thee mustn't, Abbey."

"But, Hannah, when thee's not there, then it's awful. Deborah's like the stone idols in the Scripture that stare you into fits. Take me with thee, Hannah. Don't leave me alone with her. I will work for thee and thee shall do good—thee shall be an angel to everybody."

"But it isn't possible, Abbey. We could not live together, and I can live by my own work. Besides, thee must take the team back."

"Aw, the team—why, we'd just drive on into town, and—"

"Abbey, the team's mother's. It must go back. Hark, there's the down train coming. I must get to the other side." She was half way out of the carriage when he caught her arm.

"Wait a minute—wait."—He was tugging at something that he could not loose from his hind-trousers pocket. At last it came with a thump and a rattle of metal and hit the iron rim of the wagon step. He thrust it into Hannah's coat at the breast.

"Take that. It'll help thee at the start."

She tried to tell him how touched she was by his generosity, and to give back the old knit stocking which had now dropped down by its own weight nearly to her waist, but the train was at the turn and the whistle warned her she must run or miss it. She got aboard and she stayed on the platform, waving to Abbey, till they entered the cut a quarter mile below and she could see him no more.

CHAPTER XVII

Summer came and summer waned and the autumn crept up Sycamore-way with chilling fingers that touched a brown edge to the leaves and turned the harvest to russet crispness in the fields. The barns were filling up, the cattle were huddling in protected corners out of the north wind; there was a smell of burning wood in the air and frost had been seen in the low marshes. But now it was Indian summer. It had come like a hazy dream to throw a mantle of poetry over the hard facts of earth. It seemed intended as an after-thought of the year to give man and beast a respite before they plunged into the rigors of winter.

The song sparrow came back as if to correct a mistake, and spilt his little drops of music from the yellowing homestead trees; and occasionally across the fields of stacked corn would float the harsh joy of the black-bird; and then away off somewhere, from a white-washed barn a long luxurious cock-crow would

break the haunted air. Thus was the great miracle of nature's pageant mingled with the homely lot of man.

The white buttonwoods that shaded, like ranks of good-natured giants, the little grass-grown lane up to Deborah Bye's doorway, were fading into sereneness. The path-way was ankle deep in leaves that used to hang in lively happiness from the wind-blown branches above. The sun fell in daily widening spots of radiance on house and barnyard, fences and spring-house; and the great turn of the year from open warmth to indoor chill had begun.

There was no change to speak of at the farm. Abbey went about his daily work with less inclination to whistle or turn an occasional hand spring. The fiddle lay silent in its case at Tom Darlington's. He was thoughtful and preoccupied. A grief had touched his light heart and tamed it. He wanted for the first time in his life to go to the City. 'Liza had Hannah's work to do, and while she was never without a beau from some neighboring farm who would come 'round of an evening with a low whistle up the lane, she had less time to gossip, though no less desire.

Deborah was grim, silent, and devout. Never before had she hugged her austere religion so closely to her bosom. It was almost as though she felt the pious luxury of the hair-shirt of ancient sacrifice or that she gathered into her vitals the sword of self-immolation. She would say a grace in silence before each meal, so long and in so stern a manner that Abbey and 'Liza, afraid to stir from their attitude of devotion but faintly felt, would almost scream with the tension.

Morning and evening she prayed on her knees and every hour unoccupied by work was devoted to the Bible. Fierce must have been the conflict within her between natural affection, the grief of human severance from her own, and the bigotry of her creed, in whose name she could commit cruel offences against the law of the heart.

Down at Hackett's store things went on just as usual. There had been a nine days' wonder followed by spurts of diminishing excitement when Hannah had left. It was known that the little red auto had again carried off its victim, like the resistless Minotaur of fable; but nobody at the store ever penetrated far enough

out of Sycamore to think of tracing the fugitives. Abel Howell was still on the lookout for tidings of Ruth, but he was never active enough to trace any clue to its source. He was now taking his butter and produce to the market in town every Friday and standing at his stall on Saturday, and this somewhat increased his limited horizon. He sometimes even ventured on a Friday night to go with the Darlington boys to McCann's Café; but Abel was too much of a country boy to care about the insincere and cheerless fun of such a place. He went there more in the hope of hearing news of, or encountering, Jarrett than of joining the sports.

The fact that Hannah had come back to her home in April and had gone away again was not widely known, though a rumor had escaped, perhaps through some of 'Liza's beaux, that Hannah had returned and been driven from home by her mother. The news was vaguely current, but hardly believed. Was not Deborah more earnest in her religious ministrations than ever before? Was she not more energetic in prayer and in preaching wherever the faithful met for devotion? It could not

be, so said the wise old hard-shells who settled things at Hackett's of a night, that she would deal in anger with her child. Dock winked at Bella Hackett. They were willing to believe Deborah capable of doing anything in religion's name.

On an early morning of that mystical Indian summer time, when even the heart most repelled by the seductive charm of beauty must secretly have responded to the appeal of earth's decay, Deborah, fresh from her pious knees, came down the stairs so familiar to us and opened the front door. She looked up at the white-washed barn where Abbey was milking, and down the lane, deep in fallen leaves, to the road, full in the morning sunlight; then in front of her at the spring-house in the opposite meadow, dappled with misty shadows. She was turning to go indoors, when her eye caught an object lying on the stone step at her feet. She paused and looked more keenly, then stooped and peered at the gray bundle of rags which she took it to be. There was an old gray blanket evidently rolled up with something inside it and a frill of soiled white linen hung out at either end. Deborah turned the

bundle over and began to unwind it, then there was a feeble cry from inside and she saw the pink flesh of a little baby.

In spite of her rigid code—of her formidable religion, her woman's heart began to beat as it had not done since her own infant lay warm at her breast so many years ago. She hurried to uncover the poor little waif, and at last threw down the blanket and held the tiny child in her arms, blinking at her with blue eyes. There was a paper pinned at its bosom. She got out her spectacles to see what was on it. She unfolded the sheet of note paper, and read:

"Hannah Bye Jarrett."

Deborah was stunned. The appeal from the innocent and blameless angel in her arms was powerful enough before, but could it really be Hannah's? Then, indeed, her still human heart would be touched in spite of all dogma, all convention. She looked at its eyes less sternly than she had gazed into any human face these many years, and it actually smiled up at her as though it had just got awake and was hungry both for caresses and for food.

What should she do? She, Deborah Bye, should she confess that she wanted to harbor

somebody's forsaken child, perhaps a bastard of the streets, perhaps—and she was moved by many conflicting emotions—perhaps Hannah's, born out of wedlock? How could she reconcile such an impulse with the straight and narrow course of her religion? She stood there while these doubts mingled with the tug at her heart from the helpless smiling little face and she was for once in her life without a compass, with no direction from her governing dogma.

Then she turned to go into the dining-room, but the instinct to find out where the baby had come from made her pause. She called to Abbey:

"Abbey, come here, I want thee."

Abbey left his milking and trudged with no great willingness to the open door. He was half obedient, half sullen. He stood outside on the step with even his curiosity abated by the fear of Deborah.

"Did thee see anybody this morning leave a bundle tied up in that blanket? She touched it with her foot. He picked up the blanket and looked it over, shaking his head, "No."

"Did 'Liza?" said Deborah.

Abbey went around outside to call her from

the kitchen. 'Liza came through the dining-room, followed by Abbey. When she saw Deborah with a baby in her arms she stopped and took a long breath and half turned away.

"'Liza, come here," commanded Deborah. "Did thee see anybody leave a bundle here," she nodded to the step, "this morning tied up in that blanket?"

'Liza was frightened to death. She looked at the baby as though it were a ghost or a fairy or one of those ogres which girls are always expecting with a thrill of fearful joy. She did not want to come any nearer, but sidled round Deborah, whose question had to be answered. She looked at the gray blanket and threw it down. She knew nothing about it.

"I ain't seen or heard anything this morning. Deborah," she said—keeping her large eyes on the baby as though it would bite her if she turned away.

Deborah hardly knew what to do next. There was the baby awake and warm in her arms. That was a fact too solid to blink. The next step was to feed it. She sent Abbey for milk, and then sat down in the big rocking-chair in the dining-room to rock and rock the

dear little thing into comfort and repose. How it smiled up at her and seemed to know her!

It was making deep inroads in her pious fences; they were down in so many places that entire repair might never be possible. But this she would not have acknowledged. What she was doing was an act of humanity. Even the most heartless of beings—so she was mechanically thinking—must put forth efforts to save such a pitiful little stray lamb. After all, it had a soul. And thus Deborah reconciled duty and inclination.

With Abbey and 'Liza staring as though the act was a sensational curiosity the baby was fed, and liked it so well that it actually tried to gurgle a sort of gratitude, which Deborah secretly appropriated to herself. She was taking to the business of nursing as though she had found a way she had long ago lost and rejoiced in following it. In fact, her rather ill-used heart was asserting itself. She had starved it so long and so persistently that it got beyond her control when such a chance offered to generate some normal palpitations. She rocked and rocked and actually hummed an

old, old ballad tune which nobody had heard for half a century. The little thing in her arms went to sleep, and she felt a comfort too deep for any explanations or excuses. She was happy as she had not been for years and she did not know the sensation well enough to put it into words. That one word happiness was taboo. Nobody should be happy in a world of sin and suffering.

Perhaps these thoughts were nebulously forming and dispersing in her mind, and she was almost dozing herself, in the unaccustomed relaxation of her alert piety, when, what was that? Wheels grinding in the ruts of the lane outside? Were they real or dream wheels?

"'Liza," she called. And 'Liza startled and afraid popped her head through the door from the kitchen.

"Who's outside in the carriage?"

'Liza ran through to the front door, and came back with a face of sheer idiocy.

"'Siah," she whispered in Deborah's astonished ear.

"Josiah?" exclaimed Deborah in a questioning voice. "What can he want at this time of day?" And then the thought of the baby came

pretty uncomfortably into the front of her mind. She made no sign of this to 'Liza—Oh, no! but she debated within her, and she finally decided against any disguises. Her truth and honor were not masks; they were among the real things of her devout life.

"Tell him to come in here," said she.

"Here?" repeated 'Liza—implying what might happen if he saw the baby.

Deborah punished her with a look, and 'Siah was brought in, wearing his solemn habit of drab and his broad brimmed beaver. Wearing, also, that countenance denoting an agency for the Powers Above, that characterized his large, ruddy, well-fed face, whether in repose or when delivering messages to the Meeting in his representative capacity.

He showed no atom of surprise to see Deborah nursing a baby, but his natural tendency to enjoy news was alert at once.

He greeted Deborah gravely and sat opposite her in a stiff backed green chair, as she motioned him to do. He was silent, then spoke deliberately:

"Friend Bye," said he. "I have a concern to convey to thee. My mind has long been dis-

turbed by the levity of some of our young Friends. This was marked by the disappearance of Ruth Blake, and that deplorable event has had its effect on many young Friends in our Meeting. Isabella Hackett and Lydia Paulding are less punctual attenders than formerly, and I am told that Thomas and Joshua Darlington, and even Abel Howell, are frequenting places of questionable resort in the City. I have come to see if thy own daughter, Hannah, whose absence we much deplore, is free from blame in this growing favor for the things of the flesh?"

"Josiah," replied Deborah, with no apparent irritation, but with concern as deep as his own, "I have not failed to notice what thee speaks of so properly. I have watched with alarm the loosening of bonds and the yielding to the Tempter. And in this I am, I feel, not without sin."

He interrupted her with a gesture of deprecation.

"Not without sin," she repeated, "though my disobedient daughter has taken her own ways without heeding the teachings of a pure and spiritual household."

He lifted his hand as if to say, "Amen."

"And this morning, friend Josiah, I have a further evidence that the Lord does not smile upon our Society. Thee sees this little creature in my arms?"

He looked at it from afar off as if it were not in his line, whose duty was with grown-up conduct.

"This little baby,"—it was smiling up at her and she could hardly restrain herself from caressing its dimpled cheek, "was left here in a bundle on the step—"

He visibly hardened. A legitimate baby was not within the limits of his agency; but a bad baby, a vagrant baby, a baby conceived in sin—that was another matter. Immediately this kind of a baby came within the jurisdiction of which 'Siah was the agent, and he must, in duty bound, express his disapproval of anything so contrary to dogma.

"Does thee mean to say, Deborah Bye, that the baby thee has in thy arms is a—a—a—bastard?"

"I know nothing about it, Josiah. All I know is that I found it not an hour ago on that step, bundled up in that gray blanket thee prob-

ably trod on in coming into the house."

He held his chin in his hand and frowned in troubled thought long and painfully.

"Has thee then no suspicion of its origin?" said he at last.

She stopped rocking the chair and got out her glasses.

"Look at that," she said, and handed him the sheet of note paper which was pinned to the baby's dress.

He opened and read it, and his eyes actually bulged with horror and amazement.

"Then this is Hannah's child, and she has sinned and is damned."

Deborah would herself have condemned Hannah with equal readiness, but she was not going to let anybody else do it, not even Josiah, without a plea in mitigation of the charge.

"The name implies what thee declares, Friend Vogdes, but there is no positive evidence of Hannah's guilt and I, as her mother, refuse to believe it a possibility until Hannah herself acknowledges it."

"But there is the name, Friend Deborah. Look: there is the name: Hannah Bye Jarrett. And it is known that thy daughter left this

town in the red automobile of one John Jarrett. If it is not true it has no appearance of falsehood."

Deborah was little used to opposition. She did not choose to submit to it now.

"I acknowledge Hannah's disobedience and have prayed steadily that she may see the error of her ways. Perhaps this is her child; perhaps not. I know no more about it than thee does, Friend Josiah, but—"

"And does thee then intend to keep this—this—infant, Friend Deborah?" he plausibly asked.

"I do," she stoutly replied.

Josiah was unconvinced, but he knew well enough that when Deborah had said "I do," there was no power in Sycamore Meeting to change her course.

They counseled together further on the wayward manners of the young Friends and it was decided that the subject should be carried to the Quarterly Meeting both in the Men's end by Josiah and the Women's end by Deborah.

Then Josiah got up to go. He did not venture to touch again on the closed episode of the baby. He had his convictions, but it was more

judicious to deal with that subject at another time. He rose to his stout height and said:

"Good day, Friend Bye, and may the Lord shed his mercies upon thee."

There was just a suspicion that 'Siah thought the mercies he invoked were a needed antidote for certain acts, open to censure; but, if this entered Deborah's mind her impassive face showed no sign of it; and he went out with his heavy self-righteous tread, glancing at the gray blanket with curiosity and avoiding it as if it were polluted.

Presently Deborah heard carriage wheels grate as they turned on the rutted road, and she rocked silently, with a chin of unyielding purpose, tempered by eyes that somehow softened and lost their old look of defiance when she leaned over the little darling in her arms.

It required no wireless message, no notice in the Sycamore Weekly Sunbeam, not even the well-linked chain of country gossip, to advertise to all Hannah's amiable friends that she was a mother without wedlock, a vessel of shame. Josiah Vogdes as a medium of scandal was as inevitable as evil news, which is said to fly on the wings of the wind.

Thus through this holy voice crying in the wilderness was Sycamore to know without examination, and to believe without questioning, that Hannah had sinned.

CHAPTER XVIII

When Hannah left Abbey waving a mournful farewell on the little platform of Dreamthorpe Station she had only a vague idea of the future she was going to meet. She had lived in a nest so far from storms, so snug and so well-protected, even if rather narrow, that until the ride to rescue Ruth she had never had to consider the origin of her daily bread. Her clothes, her diet, her friends had been picked out for her; even her opinions were not strictly her own.

Now if the vista was widening, its steepness must be climbed by her own feet. There was no help but her own true heart.

All this Hannah realized; and mixed up with her gentle timidity and modest dread was a half-formed self-reliance which gave her exquisite comfort and saved her from surrender to her difficulties.

The trip to the City took about three-quarters of an hour. She landed where Jarrett

had, on that hot June Sunday when he crossed from the station to McCann's Café opposite. Hannah had no friends, no refuge. She came out of the station to the street in a sort of active trance. She could hardly credit that she was free—free forever. There were wings to her feet, almost, she was, in this first moment of the new life, so intoxicated with liberty. She did not know the City. She walked on at random, full of the plans she had always held like some hidden keepsake securely wrapped up in a drawer of her mind. She would be a nurse. Yes, that was what her life had fitted her for and what she would best like. Her experience with Ruth had been a great help. She was not without some knowledge of nursing and that was a business which would protect her as well as render her useful to others.

Not a thought of her mother and the cruelty of her dismissal or of the falseness of the accusations against her, in those first hours of her struggle for support, crossed her mind. She was too engrossed to pity herself; she knew instinctively that the future was hers only on the terms of hope and cheerfulness. And she must make her own way now, before she could

even think of going back to Ruth. Doubts of Jarrett's sincerity were before her in plenty; but he had promised to return and marry Ruth, and it was inconceivable that he could be so base as to lie about this holy duty. At all events she was on her own slender resources, and until she was self-supporting she could take up no other task.

She turned into the streets that looked pleasantest. She liked those where the trees made a feeble sort of effort to remain green and she walked along with an alert tread such as she had never before known in her life. What was it? Why was her mind so light, so buoyant? She was really an outcast under severe suspicion in her own home and town. Why could she breathe so freely and fancy such comfortable things? She was without a roof to shelter her, without friends, almost without means; yet she stepped along with a light heart beating almost joyously and with a sense of protection such as comes to us only when we are stimulated by some happy augury.

She did not even inquire for a hospital, nor ring the bell at the doctors' offices she was

passing. There was a sense within her that the way would open and she went on enjoying what she saw, and walking miles through the streets without seeming to feel fatigue. Her demure and lovely face, with her plain Quaker garb of exquisite gray and white, were noticeable in thoroughfares where from year to year such costumes were growing less frequent, but she was so buoyant with her liberty and so unconscious of the impression she made of unheeding innocence and purity, that now and then a passerby would turn and look at her with unconcealed pleasure. Once a coarse-appearing fellow of Jarrett's class, not entirely sober, tried to catch up with her. He even raised his hat and might have joined her, but one look in her inspired face cured him of his sinister impulse. He laughed viciously and said: "Oh, she's a saint, I ain't out after no saints."

It grew toward dusk and even a mood like Hannah's must set its light feet on earth for nature's needs of bed and board. She looked about for some sort of shelter, and when a nurse-maid approached, she stopped her and

asked to be directed to a lodging-place. This wall-eyed inhabitant knew only her own haunts, and could give Hannah no aid.

She walked on without sense of fatigue and was pleased to see trees again, the old trees of a city square, now edged with the brown of autumn. Then there was a large, lighted, comfortable building with letters in electricity—Y. W. C. A. and she asked a woman what it was.

"Hey? Why, that's the Young Women's Christian Association," said the indignant person. To think of not knowing that conspicuous monument!

"Could thee tell me where I could get lodgings?" said Hannah.

"What, lodgin's? Why, in there, sure!" said the woman.

"Thank thee," said Hannah, and she went shyly in, and was received by a kindly matron, who drew out sufficient of her history to make sure that she was what she appeared. Hannah enjoyed the wonderful experience. It was all new to her. She felt safe in the company of the other nice girls she met there, and she rested serenely through the night.

In the morning she asked the matron for directions to a hospital where she could learn to be a nurse, and was told to go to the Humanity Hospital and clearly instructed how to get there.

With no abatement of her exhilarated mood, she set out to find the distant building. Presently she was in a very crowded thoroughfare, narrow, and full of vehicles and she looked either way at the corner, wondering which was most to her liking. She was not quite sure of her way, and as the drug-store on the opposite corner looked inviting she crossed over and went in to inquire. There was so much soda fizzing, so many sundaes in the process of assimilation, that she found it difficult to be accommodated with the desired directions. But presently a little man with a great pyramid of professional hair came out from behind the glass and politely asked what she wanted.

"Could thee tell me whether I should go to the right or left to find Cherry Street?" she said, pointing either way as she spoke.

"This way, ma'am," he said, and led her to the door to make sure that he was understood.

Just as they reached the door-step they were

hustled aside by a man in car-conductor's uniform who was wildly excited.

The drug-clerk caught him by the sleeve. "What can I do for you?" he said smoothly, as though he were administering an anodyne.

"Say—there's an accident—round the corner—Come quick," and he led the way, followed by Hannah and the drug-clerk.

It looked, indeed, a bad accident. A large auto-truck was turned on its side and lay by the curb-stone, its two free wheels still revolving. It had struck the curb and a lamp post so violently that it had rolled over. The man who had been driving the motor was not hurt and was now out of his seat looking for help; but the woman in the starched white linen dress and cap, who had been inside the wagon was stunned and lying half way out of the back door. Hannah did not hesitate a moment. She was down on her knees in the street and had the nurse's head in her lap before anybody else was near. The drug-clerk felt the nurse's pulse, as the crowd gathered; Hannah asked for water. It was brought by eager hands, and Hannah wet the red hair and the face of

the poor girl in her lap. It was not a severe shock. She was stunned, but not badly hurt, and in a few minutes she revived.

They lifted her out of the ambulance, for such it was, though Hannah did not know it, and laid her in Hannah's charge on a counter in the drug-store. Then the ambulance was quickly turned upright, and it was found that the damage was only to the body, not at all to the machinery. It would go just as well as ever.

The red haired nurse had recovered sufficiently to open her wondering eyes in Hannah's lap and ask what had happened, and when the chauffeur came in to say that he was ready to start, the nurse feebly asked to be taken away, to be taken back to the hospital. She clung fast to Hannah, who had helped to lift her into the ambulance, and who now got in beside her.

It was natural that Hannah should care for her. Nobody asked any questions; and before an explanation could be offered, for Hannah with her exacting conscience tried to divine how the nurse came to be there, the ambulance, with gong sounding, was off, and Hannah was

in the stream of tendency which was inevitably carrying her in the good Ship Destiny to her allotted future.

When they arrived at the Hospital—a great old colonial brick building with many recesses and corners—Hannah was commended by the chauffeur for her help.

"Say, you're a brick, do you know it? Wish I could show how much you done, to the folks in there." He jerked his thumb toward the white hall that Hannah was gazing into, with no-one-knows-what thoughts and hopes. But that was all; he was only an underling and in trouble himself and she was too modest and fearful to ask for his intercession. She demurely thanked him and paused, then shyly asked—

"Could thee tell me the name of this building?"

"This! This here's the Friends' Hospital," he answered, with surprise that she did not know it.

Hannah wondered that there should be two hospitals. She had been directed to the Humanity Hospital. She stood on the marble stair below the white-pillared porch to look

back at the handsome old pile, and to glance at its gardens and the statue in front. Then she slowly went down the steps and had nearly reached the gate, when a young doctor in white duck appeared at the door and called her to come back.

With a heart full of fluttering possibilities she turned and climbed the steps again and was conducted into the office of the Superintendent. He was a serious old gentleman with wise-looking glasses and a Quaker coat, and he addressed her in the Friendly language.

He wanted to know a little more about the accident. "Did thee see it happen?"

No, Hannah had not seen it happen but she had arrived just after. She did not think it anybody's fault. The auto had slipped on the smooth pavement and struck the curbstone. That was all. Then she helped the nurse, who was stunned.

The old Quaker thanked her; then, on second thought asked kindly for her name and address. He might want her testimony for the Board of Trustees.

"Hannah Bye," she said frankly, but she had no address—in fact she had only just come to

town from Sycamore, and did not know where she would live.

"Sycamore?" said he. "That is where Josiah Vogdes lives. Does thee know him?"

Hannah smiled at the question.

"Yes," she said. "I have known him from infancy. My mother and he lead the meeting."

"Oh, then I know thy mother," said the kindly old fellow.

Hannah now saw that her chance had come. She asked him somewhat timidly if he had a place for a nurse.

"Who is she?" said the Friend.

"Hannah Bye," answered Hannah.

"For thee? Why, let me see—let me see?" He opened his register and ran his finger up and down several pages; then he looked at her all over and musingly said—

"Thee was humane to Miss Binns, and they report that thee knew something of 'first-aid.'"

Hannah honestly remarked that she did not know what that was. He explained and she spoke of her experience with Ruth, but cautiously mentioned no name.

"Well, thee would do for a recruit, I guess," said he with his far-away eyes fixed on a portrait by Sully of an ancient Friend in shad-belly coat and broad-brimmed hat.

"When would thee begin; now?"

Hannah was only too glad, so he sent for the Head Nurse and told her that Hannah Bye, here, was on trial, mentioning that it was she who had rescued Miss Binns. He gravely rose and shook hands with Hannah and wished her well, and she was led away to her new duties with a heart very full of thankfulness; but not a little daunted at the fortune into which she had been thrown by the overturning automobile and the misfortune of Miss Binns.

It was the second automobile which had played a leading part in Hannah's brief career.

CHAPTER XIX

McCann's Café was running its usual Friday night pace, which was rather fast.

The swing-door downstairs was flapping like the wing of a bird of prey in constant motion, and the lights were glittering, glasses clinking, noise, motion, smoke and mingling smells, all at the limit set by the police for "a high-class ladies and gents resort"—at least this is what the proprietor claimed, but you might make your own choice of epithets.

The barkeeper of the beetle black, swallow-tail mustache was busy up to his bare arm-pits, and yet not too busy to smile with inviting hospitality, and to exchange views with the silly flies who walked into his parlor.

Tom Darlington came through with Abel Howell and went up stairs. Abel was not an alert customer. He lagged behind Tom; and paused, before ascending, to look listlessly around the bar-room from one face to another. He saw none he fancied, and he went slowly up

to join Tom at a table in the flaring room above. If light were what the habitués were seeking they got it in cascades. It came from glistening rows of electric bulbs of several colors in the ceiling and on the walls, and it illuminated a dizzy company who wore the badge of life at high pressure. The styles of Paris overripened by the taste of the Tenderloin made pictures that reeked with color. But the color that lit up the cheeks of the chic ladies who lolled at the tables or joined in the dance, owed its pigments as much to the palette as the mural wonders about them did.

An orchestra was hidden somewhere behind paper palm-trees and it scratched forth dances as melodiously as a well-executed typewriter. The dance was a sort of machine-made activity in which the faces that wheeled past you were as joyless as waxen visages in a museum.

Tom and Abel knew some fellows at a table in the corner and they sat down beside them to look on, rather than to take part in the vacant fun. They smoked quietly, with a nod now and then to an acquaintance who passed them on the way to the door.

"Say," said that bleached character called

Gene, whom Tom had encountered there before, "do you fellers want to see a real good thing? I'll take you where you'll goggle your eyes with dizziness—and it won't cost you a cent."

Tom didn't want to go. Abel didn't. They said so; but Gene continued to describe in peep-show hues and vaudeville language the allurements they were missing. They declined with amiable country good humor, and Tom pointed out a girl dancing whom he knew, and said to Abel:

"Darling's her name. Ain't she a peach? Now just look how she steps—better'n my mare, hey?"

But before Abel could give his views, he was up on his feet, and had gone swiftly toward the door where he stood like the embodiment of offence in the way of a rather stout well-built blue-eyed man who had just come in.

Abel had got him. Here was Jarrett at last. He wasn't going to give him up either, until he had dealt out to him what he had long kept in waiting. Such natures as Abel's are slow to revenge and passion, but they do not forget, and the store of their bitterness takes interest

while it lies on deposit within them. Abel turned in Jarrett's way wherever he turned, and Jarrett found he could not laugh him away, as he tried to do.

"Look here, pard," he said, "do you take yourself for a human hurdle? Get to one side there; I can't jump over you."

Abel stood stolidly in his way. Then Jarrett looked more keenly at him. His face changed from momentary annoyance to a serious recognition, and he saw that he was going to have trouble. He tried to laugh Abel away.

"Oh, I see," said Jarrett lightly, "you're from Sycamore. I thought you were trying to play at being a fence, but I guess it's offence you're feeling. Say, now, come and talk it all out over a cocktail. Don't be so serious about it." He took Abel by the arm. Abel gave him a shove and stood with blazing eyes, but never a word, awaiting his next move.

Jarrett tried to get around Abel by mixing with the crowd on the other side, but Abel reached out and caught his arm, and then there was no help for it. Jarrett gave him a punch and nearly floored him, but Abel was up and at Jarrett's throat in an instant.

Tom had come now and was trying to pull Abel off, but he knew, as nobody else there did, that this was to be a struggle to the finish with Abel, and he prudently sprang down stairs, two steps at a time, for assistance.

Abel had tried to choke Jarrett, and in their struggles the dancing had stopped and they hurled each other against the wall and out again into the middle of the floor, turning over tables and making the women scream with fright. Jarrett was bleeding and he was fiercely kicking at Abel, who never relaxed in his purpose to revenge Ruth by any injury he could inflict on her betrayer—the thief who had stolen her from him.

The fight was becoming dangerous, and the barkeeper rushed up from the floor below, doing his best to restore order and preserve the measure of his descriptive epithets. The floor was almost deserted except by Abel and Jarrett and those who were trying to part them. The women were standing on tables and chairs and the stairway was choked with spectators.

Abel was implacable. He was more wiry than Jarrett and he had received no great hurt. He had a holy cause, and it gave him unwonted

skill in the use of his arms and in escape from his assailant. He was rolling on the floor with Jarrett under him, when those on the stairs gave way to superior orders and a policeman, club in hand, and followed by Tom Darlington, came leaping into the room. He took Abel by the arm and pulled him up and then went over and tried to jerk Jarrett to his feet. The blue eyes were closed both with semi-consciousness and with the bloody punishment they had received. Jarrett was an inert bulk that toppled over on one leg and then on the other. When the officer tried to pull him up, his body swayed limply. The officer went to the window and blew his whistle, and presently two other policemen arrived. They laid hold of the once irresistible Jarrett and carried him downstairs to the patrol wagon, where he lay like a dead man on the seat opposite Abel, who had been escorted down by the other officer.

Abel had had his long cherished revenge. He had punished Jarrett, and the book-vendor would never ignore or forget him. It was worth all it cost or could cost, and Abel's slow plodding nature found relief such as the lifting of a deep constant weight alone could bring.

The next morning's newspapers naturally revealed to an incurious world that one Abel Howell and one John Jarrett, age, color and business given, had punished each other in McCann's Café over night, and would appear before a magistrate in due course of legal procedure. This was not unusual or striking news, and it arrested no eye in the huge careless city, because neither law-breaker was father, husband or brother to any family that might have cared.

But, the big type of sensation in the newspapers which languidly printed the record of Abel's luxury of revenge, were devoted to a more revolting item of news which was so cruel and atrocious that the public demanded several columns of it and would have felt deprived of its privileges if the headlines had not arrested all the morbid attention in humanity.

Thus ran the news in bold black letters:

"PRETTY BLONDE FOUND
BLEEDING.

Mystery surrounds unconscious girl in rooming-house."

The text told how she had been found by the

landlady, how she had probably lain a whole day without help or attention of any kind, how she was badly wounded in the throat and would probably die. She had been taken to the hospital unconscious and without much clue to her identity.

But there was a narrative by the policeman who first entered her room; narrative by landlady expressing astonishment that so sweet a lady had been attacked; pictures of the room, the house, the street where the deed was done; conjectures by the detectives; conjectures by the grocer on the opposite corner; conjectures by the man who left milk on the step; and in fact a quantity of conjectures out of all proportion to the known facts. The one essential fact was not even reduced to a conjecture—who had attempted to murder Rebecca Loveledge?

When she came into the hospital it was found that her wound was grave and her life was threatened. She was dressed in her blue gown of rather exaggerated fashion, which looked pitifully jejune in the atmosphere of death. Her unnatural blonde hair was disordered and awry and the extent of its arti-

ficial addition to her looks was miserably disclosed. She was neither beautiful nor good-looking, she was just a plain indifferent breathing unit that had had a feeble little talent for using the disguise of dress to conceal her original defects. Poor, weak, fallible human vanity—how lonely and broken, how mean and unsuccessful it appeared, lying there on the unbecoming stretcher in the bare receiving room of the old Hospital!

When she was laid on her cot in the ward, she was still unconscious, though the doctors expected her to revive under the stimulants they had administered. Her face was deathly pale—her plain, underbred face divested of its tints and powders and its usurped crown of hair.

There was hardly any more notice given Becky Loveledge than a score of others who come and go in a large city hospital. Of course, her affair was conspicuous in the newspapers, and even the nurses, to whom patients become quite impersonal, were curious to see what this notorious case looked like. As they hurried back and forth they would occasionally stop for a word with the nurse in charge and

linger a moment over Becky's cot; but this curiosity was soon sated.

Then the night attendants came on duty. With this shift arrived Hannah Bye—for it was her hospital that sheltered Becky—and she was curious to see if the Rebecca Loveledge whose name was in the newspapers was the same who had come to Sycamore—the same that saw Ruth take the first step on the path to sin; the same that had brought Hannah warning in the orchard that day in spring when Ruth might still have been saved if she had only given heed to the voice of righteousness.

Hannah approached the ward where Becky lay with a mixture of feelings. All the unhappy incidents of the past years were coursing through her mind. They took no order, but came and went as her expectant feelings called them up. She had been more composed, more her real self, more serene, in the months she had been serving at the Hospital than ever before in her life. She felt a part of man's universe; she was doing something to push the great ball along; she was expressing herself in sympathy, in tenderness, in usefulness; and she had associates aiming the same way. The old

tyranny was over; it was no tyranny to serve her employers; it was duty; and duty, she found, was the thing most wanted by her nature.

When Hannah stood at the foot of Becky's cot she knew at once, in spite of the absence of the old disguises, that she was in the presence of the real Becky. The sham had vanished and here was the genuine, pitiful thing. How her heart was touched by the poor creature's fate. She would have kissed her, if she had followed her impulse, in token of the deep feeling of womanly sympathy which overtook her. But this would not do between patient and nurse, and furthermore, Becky had not yet come out of her swoon. Hannah left word with Becky's nurse to call her when the patient regained her senses, and then she went about her duties.

Some time toward morning Hannah was hurriedly called for by Becky's nurse, and she went at once to the bedside. Becky had opened her eyes and was then dimly conscious, and perhaps one who knew her could help to restore her better than a stranger—so said the Doctor. Hannah tenderly leaned over her and

softly spoke her name and asked if she remembered Hannah Bye, from Sycamore. A smile of recollection fluttered over her poor face and she tried to lift her hand as if to take Hannah's. But she was too weak. Her eyes closed and she seemed about to relapse into unconsciousness. Hannah was told to sit by her cot until she roused herself again, and the midnight hours travelled by until close to morning before there was any sign from Becky.

At last she began to stir and a more intelligent look came into her pallid face, then her eyes opened and she evidently glanced around for Hannah. There she was, at her side, and an expression grateful and hopeful crossed Becky's face like a wan streak of sunshine. She was apparently trying to speak. Hannah leaned over her to listen closely.

"Hannah Bye," whispered Becky. Then a long silence. She seemed to have established that fact in her mind and was seeking others. At last she half turned her head. Hannah was alert, and put her hand in Becky's in token of nearness and help.

"I tried to save—" she murmured, then sank into silence.

Hannah made her know by some intuitive way that she comprehended what she meant, and this encouraged Becky.

"He was a crook—He ruined her. I went to warn her, but she turned me out."

This was all Becky could utter at once. Her eyes closed and she relapsed into a long silence. The next impulse to speak came with less effort. She turned her eyes painfully toward Hannah and began without preparation.

"Then he came to me and bullied me for peaching on him. She must have—squealed. I denied it, but he got nasty and—and—he knifed me here—" Feebly and in tears she pointed to her throat, which was thickly bandaged.

Hannah soothed her into composure. The message had been delivered which Becky intended Hannah to receive, and she fell into a deep sleep, holding as tight as her feeble grasp could do, the hand which Hannah had pressed into hers. As soon as she slept Hannah beckoned for the nurse of the ward and sent for the Doctor. She released herself from Becky, and turned with him into the outside corridor, where no one could hear them. Then she told

him Becky's revelation and asked what ought to be done. The Doctor said he would bring the news to the attention of the Superintendent in the morning, and explained that Hannah would be sent for when he was ready to hear her.

Hannah did not go to bed as she usually did at the end of her night's work. She lingered near Becky's cot, but did not sit beside her. She wanted to be free when she was sent for.

At eight o'clock the Superintendent arrived and not long after that Hannah was called to his office. It was the same old Quaker who had befriended her on entering. He was more grave, if anything, than before and he listened with serious eyes fixed on the portrait above him as she told what Becky had whispered to her. He asked what she knew of Rebecca Loveledge and Hannah related briefly how she had become acquainted with her.

"Thee must have some rest now," he kindly said. "Come back to me at noon, and we shall then know what to do."

Hannah had two or three hours of sleep and was punctually in the office at noon. There she found a man she had not seen before, of a

red face and wandering eyes, who had a sort of ingratiating manner that Hannah did not like. She was told to go with him to Becky's cot and help him to get the story direct from the patient herself. Hannah did not altogether approve of this, but she was under orders, and she led the detective, however reluctantly, to Becky's cot. Hannah sat beside her and took her hand. She opened her eyes and languidly smiled a welcome to Hannah, which touched a vibrating chord and brought tears to Hannah's eyes. The detective stood respectfully at the foot of the cot and when Becky had looked long and affectionately at Hannah, her eye caught the figure of the man, and she shrank from him as though she took him to be Jarrett. Hannah soothed her and told her they only wanted the story she had spoken last night—wanted it for use, to prevent others from suffering as she was suffering; it was best she should tell them all she knew; it was right that she should—"

Becky showed no disinclination to speak; indeed, her reasons would have been different from Hannah's. She wanted punishment for Jarrett—revenge, an eye for an eye.

"Yes," she formed the word rather than said it, as her stiffened head lay motionless on the pillow.

The detective took the chair beside her. With a few words, now and then, between long pauses, and with evident pain, but with a fire of vindictiveness within her which burned dimly in her eyes, she told even more than she had last night told Hannah.

Jarrett was her assailant. She and Jarrett had been intimate for two years. He had come to her room in a fighting temper and had wounded her without provocation because he charged her with betraying his wickedness. She had struggled with him, but he was too powerful, and she had fallen on the red couch helplessly wounded, and had lain there all day unable to call for help.

The fire burned in her with hectic brightness while she was aroused by memory of her wrongs, but it consumed her little strength and her eyes closed in exhaustion. Hannah motioned the detective to stop. He had been setting down on paper what Becky said, and he now sat quite still beside her until she should reawaken. It was long—very long, it seemed.

But at last she looked around for Hannah and saw the detective still beside her. Her face showed a flash of memory and she seemed satisfied. Then the detective asked her if she would listen while he read the declaration. She waited while he read, and signified that it was right. He handed her his pen and, without moving her head, she scrawled her name to it and again was exhausted. Hannah took the seat beside her now and the detective noiselessly disappeared.

Becky had signed the death-warrant of John Jarrett. Abel Howell had put him in jail. And Hannah? Would she willingly have taken one pace toward his destruction?

Her heart was sore at the wrongs suffered by Ruth. Whether it were according to the tenets of her faith or not—whether true to the simple ethics of her mother's creed or not, she could not suppress a certain joy that wickedly sang within her soul over the atonement of the foes of the Lord.

Becky slept after her exertion, and Hannah went to her room for needed rest. She did not come on duty again until midnight.

As soon as she could leave her own patients

she went over to the ward where Becky lay.

The cot was empty!

Hannah sat down in the corridor and wept silently for many minutes. She did not love Becky; in her inmost heart she loathed her. Becky was the opposite to whatever Hannah cherished and revered. But the whole tragedy of Hannah's life was entangled in the skeins of Becky's brief career, and it was Ruth she wept for, tear for tear with Becky—Ruth, and her mother, and her home with its dear old feelings and habits.

But Hannah had fast taken on maturity and self-reliance. She had found her instincts right. Duty and work were the antidotes to sorrow and suffering. She must take up her burden lightly and the pangs would find their place—their subordinate but fitting place. She went back to her patients in a sort of exalted sadness. The enemies of the Lord were eternally smitten. The trumpets of Israel had encircled the walls of Jericho and they were fallen. So rang the words in her busy mind, in spite of all repression. The subdued instincts of a life-time thus broke forth and prevailed over sobriety and conduct.

CHAPTER XX

Summer had come again to the familiar hill-slopes and valleys. Sycamore was roofed with leaves, and pleasant breadths of shade lay across the wide lazy road.

The winter and spring were made historic by the trial and execution of Jarrett; and the village had never before found itself so bitterly connected with the world outside. It had literally shuddered at the crime and its punishment and it was willing to forget its one sensational episode in the hard work of the dairy and the plough.

Abel Howell took his brief sentence for disorderly conduct with a sort of joyous suffering. It had been made light, because to him more than to anybody else, was due the swift capture of Jarrett. He went back home an object of intense curiosity and some adulation.

Hackett's store was full of him—how he looked, what he said, whom he talked to, what

time he arrived and as much more as fancy could invent, until Abel became the hero of the hour. And when he actually drove up to the store on Saturday night, he was as enthusiastically received as though he were a real criminal of twenty years incarceration just emerging from behind the bars, to whom a sympathetic public brings purses, and offers forgiveness in the form of tear-wet bouquets. Abel took it all in his inexpressive way and told little, which made his neighbors guess much. His concern was for Ruth. He had heard nothing from her nor about her; but his heart was as true as the sun.

Deborah's household was changed as it had not before been in a life-time. The three clean-curtained windows still looked down at you as you lifted the brass knocker and the tidy hall wore its old pattern of oil cloth. The dining-room lacked only the presence of Hannah to make its every possession as it had always been; and the old rutted tree-bordered lane outside showed hardly a blade of grass more or less than when you first saw it.

But there was a change—a subtle and unacknowledged change that was felt rather than

seen. It had its chief expression in the occasional cry of an infant, or in its delighted chuckle as Deborah Bye played with it in entire forgetfulness of an austere religion and a sinful world.

Abbey and 'Liza well knew the change. They found life more possible, and they made more of it. Deborah had not relaxed in her treatment of them, but they knew that they dared to do more; and they whistled and sang at their work as they had not done since Ruth's flight and Hannah's disobedience.

Abbey even brought his fiddle to the barn, and if Deborah had not been so engrossed in listening to the baby she might have heard, almost any night, some shocking dance tunes and unseemly songs scraped off in a hidden corner of the snug old stable.

Of course there were very good people in Sycamore who thought Hannah guilty; and also some very good people who thought her pure. Every community, little or big, has its people who think and see crooked, and its other people who think and see straight. When Mrs. Paulding had 'Siah to tea—meaning supper at 6.30—the subject which engrossed the pious

leader of Meeting and the women and men friends who gathered around the table, was the debatable one of Hannah's guilt or innocence.

"For my part," said Mrs. Hackett, as she reached for another corpulent muffin, "I can't see how she could have done it. With a mother like hers, and such a bringing-up—how could she allow herself to fall so low? There's nothing in the world could induce me to take up with a strange man." Mrs. Hackett might have spared herself the remark, as it was unlikely that a stranger man than Jarrett could have found in her plain face and wobbly figure the least temptation.

Mrs. Paulding was a non-committal Friend whose hovering smile and short foolish cough might mean that she was on your side or against you. You never could be sure. She said nothing, but her sly little black eyes, that never looked into yours gave clear evidence of her disapproval of Hannah.

'Siah sat before a rich plate of cold mutton and fried potatoes which he was devouring with sounds of luxurious satisfaction. He spoke with his mouth still half full and took an occasional chew between his words.

"There is no escape from the convincing fact that the—the infant was named after Hannah Bye by the person who left it on Deborah's step. I would not charge an innocent creature with so abominable a crime, but if Hannah's not guilty should she not appear and say so?"

The neat white table linen and the old fashioned china, the tea in the cups—even the great loaf of bread on its wooden platter shook as his big red fist punctuated his sentences.

"No, I am loath to condemn; and in the spirit of our Lord we must be charitable to those who fall under suspicion. It is charged upon us, Friends, that we bear no false witness, but if Hannah Bye is not guilty"—he smacked his lips with a sort of unction over the word—"I am no prophet."

There was not a dissenting voice at the table, and when the company began to separate about the polite hour of nine, there was nobody with sufficient courage, even if of clear enough mental vision, to gainsay what had been, by such ample authority, declared.

At Hackett's store it was the same. Dock had his mind made up. "Of course it is her child. Didn't her mother take it in and keep

it? I guess she knows well enough," and he snorted his superior insight and quite routed any unbeliever.

"And yet I'd never have thought it of her," said Bella Hackett. She was always so good —maybe too good. These overly good people are more apt to go wrong than us sinners—ain't they, Dan?" said she.

Dan Dotterer had inward workings, as though he were going to speak long before his words came. When they did come they occasionally carried some rustic wisdom.

"If you want my 'pinion you can have it, an' here it is: If Hannah Bye's a sinner, then all o' you's innocent, an' that I'm not believin'."

Bella went over and snatched his old slouch hat and threw it into the meal barrel. He spurted forth a faucet-like stream of laughter and poked it out. But he had not spoken lightly. He believed in Hannah, as all her humbler neighbors did.

To be sure the subject had been touched on from every side at Meeting except the direct side. Nobody would think of overstepping the unwritten law that names and facts should be suppressed. You could inveigh against your

neighbors as much as you pleased by representing them as Nadab or Meshak or Cain or Jael; but it would be contrary to etiquette to say that you suspected Hannah Bye of the motherhood of a stray child. The Lord would know what you meant and your fellow-worshippers would guess, and the satisfaction to you would be the same.

Thus the theme had been snatched by everybody who could use the language of the exhorter, as either a text for a general lesson or as a matter of evening-up his or her own average of goodness with the world's badness. The underlying thought—unacknowledged but potent—was that to prove Hannah, who was apparently a spotless soul, a sinner, you somehow excused your own lapses.

From Sunday morning to Sunday morning through the Winter and Spring, this had more or less occupied the Meeting, and it was generally accepted, though not offensively or actively, that Hannah was guilty. Deborah herself was uncertain, and was less assertive than she had always been, because her high record for righteousness was, she felt, and, indeed saw, somewhat tarnished.

Hannah, the product of her religious training, had gone the way of all flesh. Added to this she had kept the child of sin that was left at her door. Deborah was just as uncompromising as ever, but there was a visible relaxing in her hold on Meeting.

Thus it stood with Hillslope Meeting on a Sunday in June when the loveliness of Nature's approaches to man should have softened every human soul; when, in truth, the miracle of the resurrection of growth and green life ought to have been more convincing to the groping spirit of the presence of intelligent power in the conduct of the universe than any book-miracle that man's mind could invent.

The old Meeting House was sprinkled with sun and shadow from the overhanging buttonwoods and poplars, in which a choir of robins and song-sparrows was making a mockery of the orthodox disapproval of music. The dusty carriages were slowly climbing the hill and turning in at the gate, and elderly Friends of serious countenance were alighting at the carriage block and gravely passing in. The gayer young men and women who took Meeting as a rather sober holiday-making had gathered in

knots about the yard and talked in subdued tones until the last carriage conveyed the last elder to the door. Then they filed in, and the rustling was stilled and 'Siah in his broad beaver and Deborah in her silver-gray bonnet in the low gallery, looked with unseeing eyes at the congregation and the congregation returned the solemn stare.

There was a long, breathing silence, as always, and then the visiting Friend from Milestown Meeting laid his hat on the bench behind him and rose in grim dignity. He repeated a text and discoursed in sentences made familiar to his hearers by tradition. He sat down and then another long period of self-communion ensued, broken now and then by a cough, or a whisper to a naughty child whose patience was fast petering out.

Every ear was made alert by the continued restraint, and thus the worshippers were all aware that light footsteps were treading on the grass and gravel outside. The doors were open and the birds were joyous in their freedom to worship the beauty that June had brought them. But even above their song and the sweep of wind in the leaves, it was unmistak-

able that hesitating steps were now lingering and now advancing in the old grave yard and up the stone porch. Nobody looked around; and Deborah and 'Siah might have been carved in stone as the Sphinx of the Desert with always unshut eyes, for all the notice they gave, to what was in truth causing them internal wonder and curiosity.

At last the timid footfalls were at the door and coming up the aisle straight to the steps of the low gallery, as the platform was called on which the leaders sat facing the congregation. The worshippers forgot everything; decorum, courtesy, traditions, were flung to the winds as every neck was stretched to see who it was and what was happening.

The slender figure of a young woman in well-worn clothes and a shabby hat was kneeling at the steps of the gallery, with bowed head, and hands raised in an imploring gesture. She said not a word, but bowed there like a penitent asking mercy.

"Was it Hannah Bye?" everybody was inquiring.

"No."

"Yes."

"It ain't Hannah's figure, she was stouter."

"She's speaking, hush—"

And the crowd nestled back in its seat to listen.

She was speaking in low trembling broken sentences:

"My sin be on my own head. I am guilty before man and God. But, Friends, I come to ask your mercy—I have suffered—oh, I have suffered and repented—I am—"

It was Ruth Blake—they all knew it now—Ruth Blake come back—where had she been? How could she face the Meeting? How could she come among respectable Friends?

If the Meeting had been a secular one there might have been cries of: Shame! She ought to be whipped! Drive her away! But the heart of the human is a strange organ. Its cruel instinct was just as surely there as it always is; self-righteousness is never far below the surface; yet to speak its thoughts out in Meeting! Who would dare betray his or her real self in the presence of the Most High?

Yes, there was one. Abel Howell had stepped forward to the aisle and was lifting Ruth to her feet. She raised her face to look

at him, an ineffable picture of self-accusing sorrow. She hung her head as though it had lost the support of life and Abel found her sinking from his arms. He held her up and turned her face from the throng. Then she gained courage and said, in a firmer voice, what she had evidently come to say:

"Friends, my sin is deeper than you know. It was I who laid my own illegitimate child on Deborah Bye's step. I pinned Hannah's name on it because—because I was jealous of her. I —I suspected her,—my own dear best friend—"

This was her message, and when it was delivered she was exhausted. Abel had his strong arm around her and he laid her cheek against his breast. They stood there in pathetic appeal to the forgiveness of their friends —in the presence of the Spirit who dwelt in that venerable House where the souls of generations of simple men and women had aspired to live rightly and to love their neighbors as themselves.

What would 'Siah and Deborah do? The worshippers were looking for guidance. As with true Friends the leaders waited for the

prompting of the light that shines within. They took long and deliberate concern, and while they were deciding what to do, Abel, spurred by this crisis in his homely life, was acting.

He whispered to Ruth and she assented to what he said. She clung to him now as though he were the Rock of Ages. Anything he judged to be right was right for her.

Then Abel lifted up his voice, and the Meeting was instantly hushed.

"I, Abel Howell," he was saying slowly and solemnly, as they fronted the congregation, "in the presence of the Lord and of this assembly take thee, Ruth Blake, to be my wedded wife, promising, with Divine assistance, to be unto thee a faithful and loving husband until death shall separate us."

He leaned over and told her to repeat the words and she began!

"I, Ruth Blake"—then she broke down and sobbed a moment—"I, Ruth Blake," she repeated more firmly, "in the presence of the Lord and of this assembly, take thee, Abel Howell"—and the clutch of her hands upon him was as that of a sinking soul—"to be my

wedded husband; promising with Divine assistance"—she faltered and her eyes were lifted in entreaty—"to be unto thee—a faithful and loving wife until death shall separate us."

Abel tenderly kissed her brow and there he stood before the Ark of his Covenant in defiance of the world. He was not a noble figure; simply a plain, rustic farmer, but he had the soul of a gentleman, and he did the right in the teeth of bitter prejudice. His face seemed illumined with his uplifting act.

His instinct now was to get Ruth away from the curiosity and growing agitation of the Meeting. He took her under the arm and supported her, with drooping head, down the aisle to the door. It was not far to his buggy in the wagon shed, and Ruth walked more firmly when she had passed the ordeal of searching eyes, and breathed the pure air outside.

They got in and drove away as the throng, loosed from its hushed attention, came crowding from the door to see where they had gone and what they were doing.

Abel turned in the narrow seat and waved his hand, as he and his bride drove through the gate and disappeared under the hill.

CHAPTER XXI

The three green-shaded windows were to look down on still another unwelcome visitor to Deborah Bye's farm-house.

On a dark blustery autumn day Abel Howell stood on the stone step and peered shyly up at the green curtains as though anticipating a reproof or a dismissal. He hesitated long before lifting the old brass knocker of many memories. He gave it a very apologetic stroke and timidly waited. The door opened slowly, as if by delayed or inert effort, and Deborah stood before him.

She was still severe of countenance and stony in her reception of any social appeal, but there was visibly less vigor in her offence to an intruder, and she was not alert as of old in her perceptions. She did not quickly recognize Abel and thus with shame-faced effort he was obliged to pronounce his own name.

"Come in," she said, leading the way mas-

sively to a chair; but Abel had a doubtful duty to carry out and he preferred to stand, gazing at the ceiling or across Deborah's shoulders at the china cupboard—anywhere to evade her expectant stare.

"I come over," at last he said, "to see thee on a matter thee probably anticipates—"

"I have looked long for thy visit," she said with reproach, "but I know nothing of thy errand." She kept the burden of revelation on him and looked him straight in the eye. She was much aged, he thought, from a furtive glance as she spoke.

He babbled feebly: "It was the baby—Ruth—"

She moved uneasily, which was with her a new phase. Of old she would have thundered moral wrath at the sin of Ruth. But now she was neither so sure of herself nor of the wilful sheep of her fold, and the blows of the year just gone had shaken the foundations of her will. Moreover, she was not without consciousness that Ruth might one day want her child. But she gave Abel no help. She stood in ponderous attentiveness:

"Thee sees Ruth has recovered—has got

settled now," he said, "and she thinks thee would want to be shut of the baby—and she—"

Deborah's face showed a quiver of pain, a momentary pang of despair such as no eye had before witnessed on that impassive front. But she recovered instantly and said with composure:

"It is Ruth's child and she should have it."

The sense of justice within her thus spoke; but her heart was beating its human appeal in her breast. Her stern eyes began to wander from their austerity into tears. She spoke again in broken and subdued syllables:

"She has been mine so long—I have reared her, nourished her. I have—loved her." She said the word love as though there was danger in it. "Without her I shall be a lonely old woman—a lonely—old—woman—" Her eyes were moist and gazed into the future. Then she stiffened into her convention and told him firmly to come for the little child at noon next sixth-day and she should be ready to go with him.

He was not inclined to linger. He understood little of the deep convulsion of Deborah's

proud soul; but he owned to the habitual dread of her pious wrath and he turned and left the door with thankfulness that his hard task was over.

Of course all Sycamore knew that Ruth's child was to be taken from Deborah; and every detail that was not squeezed from competent witnesses was invented by busy friends. How Deborah would bear it; how she could have kept so long in her house a foundling baby; how she, a prophetess and preacher, could have been so easily deceived; how she could have loved a child born of Ruth, and of a murderer—all this was sifted and thrashed over until everything, but the actual inner truth, was evident to everybody—was as stale as a nine-days wonder on the tenth day.

But what was not evident, not even thought of in the village and now naked country-side of autumn, was that the current of news somehow escapes, vibrates beyond its place of origin and reaches across myriads of ears to those most concerned in its message.

It went with Tom Darlington into town, by his slow-pacing market wagon, behind the heavy pair of proud bays; it found lodgment

in the numbskulls of twenty dames who bought produce, and butter and eggs from Tom and Josh; it flew through the market-shed as a very palatable morsel savoring of a case every one was on tiptoe to hear the last word about. For Sycamore was no longer the up-country village it had been before the tragedy of Jarrett and Ruth. It was in the public eye and what happened to it of evil was everybody's eager concern. Its blessings of good and happiness were its own concern.

Thus the news escaped into the kitchen of the Friends' Hospital, where much produce was carried from the market-stalls. It floated up the back-stairs into the wards, now also alert for news from that once unmapped quarter, and, of course, it was not slow in reaching Hannah Bye.

Hannah had known all the acts in the hard drama which dragged her peaceful home into the rude light of the world, but she had remained at her post—indeed she had advanced to a place of command in her hospital, in recognition of her gentle thoroughness, her sweet enduring sympathy; but she had not gone back to Sycamore. Her duties were exacting, and

besides, she felt that her presence there might beget harm for Ruth, or embarrassment for her mother.

But the news thus brought her had grown in heaviness as it travelled and she was alarmed. Had her mother actually broken down, lost her self-command—was she likely to fail and be sick, with no one nearer than Abbey and 'Liza to nurse her back to her habitual self-reliance and her vigorous health? Hannah's heart fluttered with questions. Not for one moment would she delay her return if she thought Deborah needed her. There was no atom of anger in the separation she had been made to endure. It was a necessity growing from the temperament of her mother, from the tenets of her religion, and she bowed to it without a drop of bitterness.

The news came with some exactness. The day of the baby's return to Ruth was named; next sixth-day, and this gave direction to the resolution which she finally took.

That sixth-day at the end of November was as bleak as a day of winter. The trees were bare, all but the oaks with their stiff leaves rattling in the high wind; but instead of snow, the

tree bordered lanes lay under an ankle-deep covering of foliage that only the other day hung in green beauty from the boughs.

A train rattled up to Sycamore station about three o'clock in the afternoon, and only one passenger got out. There was not a soul in the station. The agent himself was not visible. The passenger looked up and down, not as a stranger, but as one recalling the place after absence. She walked quickly to the pike, that here paralleled the railroad, and turned toward the village in its gray cluster at the cross-roads. Through this and out at the other side, and a half-mile farther on the long-loved whitewashed fence and the home-trees were in sight. She turned in under the boughs of the venerable buttonwoods, now white as bones well-picked; and, with an ecstasy of home-love and a piercing wish to laugh or cry, no matter which, she stood at last on the stone step. How many, many memories lingered there! Hannah, for it was no other, could picture them all in a mental flash. They were dear or bitter, or both in one; but she did not tarry to dwell on them. Her heart was too full, her being too choked with the kindled at-

tachments of that dearest of all spots, for any deliberate thoughts. She was in a trance of recollection. Every object was calling at once for a caress. She was swept by the renewal of a thousand old sensations suddenly made new. She turned the little brass knob and went quietly in. The clock ticked loud in the cleanly silence. She paused in startled expectancy. There was not another sound.

She looked down the oil-cloth covered hall and up the stairs of flowered carpet; not a sign of life. Then she took a step and glanced through the door ajar into the kitchen.

A monumental figure was seated, head bowed on knees and hands knotted in a gesture of despair. Not a cry, not a sob escaped to betray the suffering so deeply pictured.

It was Deborah mourning for the infant of her old age, for a broken tie that had opened a vista into love, which before she knew or acknowledged not; perhaps, too, for power lost, for aims undone.

Hannah hesitated not an instant. She ran, with a cry full of pity and affection and threw herself on her knees at her mother's feet. She took in hers the old, strong hands, and

reaching from them up to the head of sorrow, she kissed it and forced it up and shed a new and long and sacred kiss on its brow.

Deborah was bewildered. No soul had ever before thus used that massive body. She could not at first divine what had happened, and but for her softer mood, she would have administered reproof. But little by little her relaxed perception made out that it was Hannah, and the sense of recovered loss, of the substitution of this earlier and dearer love for the love just relinquished, flowed into an emotion that she could not suppress. She took Hannah to her bosom as she had never done in all her girl and womanhood, and she showed the deep comfort of possessing her, of uniting again with the child she had driven from her door.

THE END